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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY BELOVED FATHER



‘Remove the last screen,’ said the king

THE ADVENTURES OF KING VIKRAMA

By
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INTRODUCTION

IN THE days of my childhood we loved the stories of the adventures of King Vikrama or Vikramaditya, the great and noble king who reigned in Ujjaini, the capital of Malwa. In those days his name was a household word. The child today has not the same interest in him for he is not familiar with these stories. King Vikrama must have been a great man but from the legends that have grown up round him one would take him for a legendary figure. He was however, a king of flesh and blood, though the historians have not agreed on his exact identity. There is no need here to enter into a controversy about his identity. Certain facts about him are well known. He was the founder of the Vikram Era which was fifty-six years in advance of the Christian Era, he was the vanquisher of the Huns and was known as Shakari Vikram; and he was known to be a great patron of the arts, particularly of music and dancing. One legend tells us that he was invited by Lord Indra, the King of Heaven, to be a judge in a dancing competition held at the Celestial Court.

The original stories were written in Sanskrit, in two volumes, known as *Sinhasan Batrishi* and *Vaital Panchvishi*. Their authorship is unknown but they have been translated into various Indian languages, and the stories have, no doubt undergone some transformation in translation. I have taken my stories from the eighteenth century Gujarati poet Samal-

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bhat's translation, from I believe Jain sources, of *Sinhasan Batrishi*.

Vaital Panchvishi gives twenty-five tales told by the Vaital or Vamp to King Vikrama, but in *Sinhasan Batrishi* the adventures of King Vikrama are related to King Bhoja by thirty-two statuettes, which form the pedestal to King Vikrama's famous throne. I have selected only eight stories of varied interest from *Sinhasan Batrishi*.

I had hoped to publish the book two years ago, at the time of the twentieth centenary celebrations of King Vikrama, but it could not be. I hope that the interest shown by people in King Vikrama at that time still continues and that they, particularly the young, will enjoy reading these stories.

I have to thank Mr Yagnesh Shukla for illustrating the stories.

H. M.

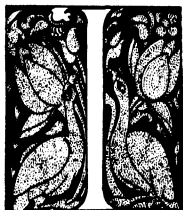
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King Bhoja Finds a Throne

IN the reign of King Bhoja of Malwa, there lived in his beautiful city of Dhara a brahmin and a goldsmith. They were great friends. The brahmin had learning and the goldsmith knew his craft, and yet they were poor. One day the goldsmith said to the brahmin, 'Friend, you and I are lost in this big city, where live hundreds of men with greater learning, and hundreds of men with a better knowledge of their arts and crafts. The best thing for us, therefore, is to go abroad and make our living there where we shall be better appreciated. When we have made plenty of money we shall return and build our own home and live happily ever after.'

The brahmin felt the truth of his friend's words and they both decided to try their fortunes elsewhere. The brahmin communicated this decision to his wife. While saying good-bye to her, he asked her not to worry: 'Try and put up with this wretched life for a few days more. By the grace of God, I shall return soon with plenty of money, and then we shall live happily.'

On an auspicious day the friends from Dhara set out to find 'fair fields and pastures new'. They set out on foot, halting at night in some village and

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travelling all day. After some days they reached a town called Kanakpur on the western sea coast. It was their first sight of the sea and they were overwhelmed with great joy and wonder at the mass of water they saw. As there was no further to go on foot, the friends decided to stay at Kanakpur.

The goldsmith opened a shop and with his fine workmanship pleased the people of Kanakpur. As he became known, more customers patronized his shop and money came pouring in. The brahmin opened a school and in course of time began to attract many children. Now Vijaypal, the king of Kanakpur had a small son, Tejpal. When it came to the ears of the king that a learned brahmin from Dhara had opened a school, he felt that his son should be placed in the hands of such a learned man, and he sent for the brahmin. The brahmin agreed to take charge of the prince and teach him everything that a young prince should know.

Thus days passed. One day the goldsmith felt that he had now earned enough and he ought to think of his home and family. He went to the brahmin and said, 'Friend, I have decided to return home. If you are of the same mind, then let us start at once. But in case you still wish to carry on here, then allow me to go alone.'

The brahmin also felt that it was time to return. The thought of his wife and children made him feel very homesick. He forthwith went to the king and asked for his permission to leave Kanakpur. The king, however, was reluctant to lose such a tutor for his son till the prince had finished his education. He,

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therefore, asked the brahmin why he was in such a hurry to go. The brahmin informed the king that he had left his family at home. He did not know how his wife and children were, whether they were flourishing, or in need, and starving. 'I should like you to stay a little longer,' said the king, 'till the young prince has finished his schooling. If you wish to, you can send home some money with your friend, though I would advise you not to trust a goldsmith. A goldsmith is a king among thieves. To trust him is to mortgage one's wisdom.'

'No! no!' protested the brahmin. 'He is my friend and a good man. I have implicit faith in him.'

Then the king gave him four precious stones to send home, which the brahmin gave to his friend, asking him in turn to deliver them to his wife and to tell her that all was well with him and he would return home soon.

So the goldsmith set out on his return journey alone. On the way he began to think about the precious stones entrusted to his care. The more he thought of them the more he was tempted to keep them for himself. 'No one can associate a poor brahmin with such gems,' thought he. 'I must keep them for myself, by hook or by crook.'

When he reached home he showed them to his wife and boasted about his great deeds which had won him such reward. He dug a hole in his bedroom and hid them. Then he took five of his neighbours to the brahmin's house. He had bribed them beforehand not to tell anyone what they saw

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him giving to the brahmin's wife. He gave her the good news of her husband and said, 'He is returning soon and in the meanwhile he has sent you these'. With these words he handed her four gold pieces.

The wife was overjoyed to hear the good news of her husband and more so with the gold. She spent one piece in buying clothes for herself and family; the other she spent in storing food; the third had to be given to their creditors, and the fourth was kept for household use. And so no one knew about the stones.

When the prince finished his education the king permitted the brahmin to depart and asked him to take as much money as he liked. The brahmin, however, was afraid to carry much wealth on a lonely journey. He was content with enough gold to fill his pot, which he carried with him and thus returned.

The news that he was returning home reached his wife. On the day he arrived she sent for all their friends and relatives and prepared a great feast to welcome him. The goldsmith was also there and they all remained talking and laughing till midnight.

When the guests had departed and the brahmin was alone with his wife he expressed surprise that she was living in the same old way. 'What has become of the four precious stones I sent you?' he asked. 'What have you done with them? We shall sell them now and have grand wedding celebrations for our children. No one will point a finger at us now. We shall feed our friends and we shall buy ornaments for you.'

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The poor wife did not know what he was talking about. She was terrified and thought he had gone mad the way he went on talking about the four gems. She tried to humour him: 'You are tired, go to bed. Do not talk about money. Greed paves the way to hell. I do not want anything now that you have come home.'

The brahmin was hurt at the woman's words. 'You think I am mad! I gave four precious stones to the goldsmith to give to you. Has he not given them?' 'I know nothing about your precious stones,' the brahminee replied. 'May God punish me if I lie. The goldsmith gave me only four pieces of gold which I have spent already.'

The brahmin did not know what to say. He could not sleep the whole night. At day-break he went to his friend's house and said: 'Well done my friend! Thank you for your consideration for me. You have done well in preserving the stones for me for fear that my wife might sell them and spend all the money.'

The goldsmith, however, said that he had given them to his wife. The brahmin said he had not; and the goldsmith insisted he had; and so from words they came to blows. The neighbours came running; and the passers-by all stopped, to see the quarrel.

'I have given them to your wife,' shouted the goldsmith, 'and you come accusing me of keeping them. I gave them the very next day after I returned, in the presence of five witnesses. The great King Bhoja will judge who is right.'

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The quarrel reached the ears of the king, and the brahmin, his wife and the goldsmith were summoned to his presence. The king asked the brahmin's wife whether she had received the gems. She put her hands to her ears and said she knew nothing about them. Then the king asked the goldsmith who said: 'My Lord! no man however poor would keep a brahmin's wealth. It is a sin to steal money from a brahmin. I gave the gems to his wife as soon as I returned.'

The king asked for proof, and said if he could produce five witnesses he would accept his word. The goldsmith brought his five neighbours who when questioned replied, 'Your Majesty! We did see the goldsmith giving four pieces to the brahmin's wife'.

So the word of the five was accepted and the brahmin was proved a liar. The king said that as the culprit was a brahmin, he did not wish to inflict a heavy punishment on him, but ordered him to be driven out of the city. The king's servants hastened to the brahmin's house to execute the order. Both husband and wife were to be taken, so the Royal decree went, outside the precincts of the city and left there. As they were being taken out they were followed by crowds of people, who shouted 'Liar! Liar!' The goldsmith and the five witnesses also joined this procession.

Now outside the city there was a pasture, where cowherd boys came to graze their cows. While the cows grazed, the young cowherds would sit on a small mound under the shade of a huge tree and play 'king and his court'. One would become king,

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another prime minister and so on. One day they were playing and the cowherd king was holding his court. They saw a huge crowd coming towards them. As the crowd came near they saw a man and a woman crying and others shouting 'Liar! Liar!' behind them. The mock king ordered his attendants to find out what it was all about. Two or three cowherds ran and brought the brahmin and his wife before the king. The mock king heard their story and said, 'Whoever tells the truth will go home safely, but whoever tells a lie, his head will be broken'.

He then ordered each of them, including the goldsmith and the five witnesses, to be given some clay and asked them to produce the models of the precious stones in clay. **NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR**

The brahmin and the goldsmith who had seen the stones did not find it difficult to reproduce them, however crudely. The woman who had not seen them could do nothing. The five witnesses who had not actually seen the stones used their imagination but produced different shapes. The mock king knew at once that the witnesses were false, and ordered his attendants to beat them till they confessed. The attendants belaboured them with their thick sticks till they cried out and confessed their guilt. They admitted having been bribed by the goldsmith to tell a lie. So the mock king ordered the goldsmith to be arrested, hung from the tree and beaten till he gave back the stones.

The goldsmith realized that the cowherds were serious, and unless he confessed and gave back the stones he would be beaten to death. He asked for

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mercy and told the truth, and informed them where the stones were hidden. The cowherd king sent his attendants to the goldsmith's house to bring back the stones. They were then returned to the brahmin. The husband and wife were very happy; and thanked the mock king with all their heart and departed. The goldsmith and the false witnesses had their faces blackened, they were mounted on donkeys, facing the tail, and were then taken round the principal streets of the city.

The chief minister heard this wonderful tale and told the king what had happened. The king was very pleased and, accompanied by the chief minister, went outside the city to the court of the mock king to felicitate him on the clever way he had discovered the truth and punished the real culprits. He asked the young man a number of questions and was pleased with the clever replies he gave. He then invited him to his court in the evening when the cowherds returned home.

When evening came and the sun began to sink behind the western hills, the cows left the pastures and the clouds of dust raised by them heralded their return home. People went in crowds to receive the mock king at the city gates. He was taken in procession to the king who received him with honour, and asked him to sit by his side.

The king, however, was struck by the difference between the young man who now sat by his side and the boy he had seen in his court on the mound. Here he was no better than a dull rustic, and was unable to give any replies to the questions the king

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asked, and only stared at him in stupefaction. Both the king and the minister felt that there was something mysterious about the place itself where the cow-herd held his court.

After some time another incident happened. A wealthy merchant in the city had four sons. He had extensive business interests and had amassed great wealth from various sources. At the age of seventy he fell ill and knew that he was dying. He sent for his four sons and told them that they should give plenty of money in charity, following his obsequies, and a month after the funeral rites were over, they should dig under his bed where he had buried a chest. They would find his will in that chest, and should divide his wealth accordingly.

The merchant died, and the sons carried out his last wishes and spent large sums of money in charity. After a month they assembled again to dig out the chest and divide the wealth according to the will. When they opened the chest they found only four things inside, a piece of blank paper, a stone, a piece of iron and a piece of cowdung. The four brothers were very surprised and did not know in what way to distribute their wealth. So they went to the king, and the king consulted the chief minister, but neither could solve the puzzle.

One day the four brothers were wandering near the mound outside the city. They were discussing their dilemma and looked very unhappy. The mock king saw that they were in distress and sent for them. When he heard the story he asked them to bring the chest. When the box was brought, he opened it, and

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found a piece of paper, a stone, a piece of iron and a piece of cowdung. The mock king smiled and said there was no need for them to worry, the whole thing, he said, was very clear. 'This piece of paper means all the banking business, loans, etc.; the stone means the business in precious stones; the piece of iron means your business in metals; and this cowdung indicates your landed property and agriculture. You must draw lots and divide the wealth accordingly.' The four brothers did as they were told and were very happy at this solution of their difficulty.

This second incident confirmed King Bhoja and his chief minister in their opinion that there was some miracle about the place itself where the cowherd king held his court. The king ordered the place to be dug up to find if there was anything buried under the mound. And sure enough there was found, all buried under the dust of ages, a beautiful throne made of solid gold and inlaid with precious stones. It stood on a pedestal made of thirty-two golden statuettes. The throne could be mounted by stepping on the heads of these figures.

The king was immensely pleased. He had the throne thoroughly cleaned and polished. Then he asked the astrologers to name an auspicious day for him to mount the throne. On the appointed day the king held his court. He worshipped the throne before preparing to mount it, but as he raised his foot he heard a small voice crying 'Stop! stop!'

The king hastily withdrew his foot and bent down to see where the voice came from, and found the lips of one of the golden figures moving. 'Who are

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you ?' asked the king.

'My name is Pavitra,' said the little figure. 'This throne belonged to the great, good King Vikram, one who was ever ready to help those in distress. There has never been such a great and magnanimous king on earth. He was the descendant of Lord Indra himself. No one can sit on this throne unless he is like Vikram. If he does so unworthily, misery will be his lot.'

'What has Vikram done to deserve such praise ? Please tell me. How is he the descendant of Lord Indra, as you say ?' asked the king, with folded hands.

'Listen, O King!' said the figure; and began to tell the story of King Gardabhshena.

The Story of Gardabhsena



ONCE upon a time Lord Indra, the king of all celestial beings was holding his court. There were beautiful and talented dancers present and the whole court was pleased with their performance. There was, however, one nymph who specially attracted the notice of everyone. Even Lord Indra was very pleased with her. He thought, 'I shall present her to Lord Shiva, the king of dancers. I am sure he will be very happy to receive such a gift.'

He therefore ordered the dancer to go to Kailas where Lord Shiva lived. 'It will be a great achievement in your life, and a real honour, if you are able to please the great dancer,' he said. The nymph obeyed the order, and set out for Kailas.

On the way she met a son of Lord Indra who asked her whither she was bound. She told him that she was on the way to Kailas, as ordered by his father.

'Oh, what is the use of going to Kailas?' asked the young god, 'Lord Shiva is an old recluse, what does he know of dancing? How can you get on with such a crude ascetic? You had better go with me.' After a great deal of persuasion, the nymph at last consented to go with the son of Lord Indra.

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Neither his father nor Lord Shiva knew what had happened.

A few days later Lord Indra went to Kailas to pay a visit to Lord Shiva. The great Lord, Mahadeva, treated him with great courtesy, and was very hospitable to him. One day Lord Indra asked him, 'My Lord Shiva, I sent a nymph from my court some time back as a present for you. I do not see her here. Are you pleased with her dancing? Has she danced before you?'

Mahadeva was surprised at this question, and so was Lord Indra when he learnt that no such nymph had arrived at Kailas.

On his return, Lord Indra sent his men round to find out what had happened to the nymph. The messengers scoured the heavens and at last found her and brought her before Lord Indra. The poor nymph was all a-tremble. She bowed to the feet of the Master and gave her explanation, 'My Lord! I was on my way to Kailas when I met your son. He stopped me from going to Lord Shiva and persuaded me to go with him. It is indeed not my fault. How could I refuse your son?'

Hearing this Lord Indra sent for his son, and asked him if what he heard was true. When he was told that it was true Lord Indra was beside himself with rage and cursed his son, 'Go to the earth and be an ass there. Your behaviour has been like that of an ass who acts without reason—one who eats filth, whose worth is less than dust, that is the animal you shall become on earth, a potter's stupid ass.'

The son was prostrate with grief. He hurried to

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Kailas and prayed Lord Shiva, with folded hands and on bended knees, to forgive him, and to intervene with his father and save him from such a curse.

The great God was all compassion. He reasoned with Lord Indra that it did not behove him to be so angry with his son, and at last the Lord relented, 'What I have said must come true,' he said. 'You will be born an ass but each night you will be able to assume your celestial form. When you have married three beautiful women, and when each of them becomes pregnant with your light, then you will return to heaven. You will be on earth for a short time, but even in that short time you will do great things.'

So, cursed by Lord Indra, the boy descended to earth. He was born at Stambhatirth to a potter's donkey. The potter owned a number of donkeys, young and old; and this addition caused no excitement. One night he was sleeping outside his hut when he heard a strange voice. 'Ai, potter! Get up. Go and tell your king to come and meet me with presents. I wish to marry his daughter, go at once. If you go and give him my message, I shall make you happy and rich, but if you do not obey me then I will teach you what misery means.'

The potter was roused from his sleep. He looked round but when he saw there was no one near except the donkeys, he thought it had been a dream and went back to sleep.

Again he heard the voice, now threatening, and very close to him 'Ai, did you not hear me? You don't seem to know me. Go and tell your king to

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meet me tomorrow or I shall kill you.'

This time the potter was frightened. He jumped out of his bed to find the owner of the voice. The only one close to him, however, was one of the donkeys, and the wonder of wonders was that, it was the donkey who was speaking. The potter was terrified and ran out of the place.

He ran and ran, and at the break of day found himself near the house of the chief minister. He sent word that he wished to see the minister on some very urgent business. When he was admitted to his presence the potter told him about the happenings of the night.

'My lord! A strange thing happened at my home soon after midnight. I have come to tell your Honour about it. I have a donkey that talks like a man. He asked me to go to the king and to tell him to marry his beautiful daughter to him, and if the king does not do so he has threatened to burn the whole city. He also threatened to kill me if I did not take this message to the king.'

The minister soothed the excited man who assured him again and again that he was sober, and promised to go that night to the potter's home and see for himself if the donkey talked again.

Late that evening the chief minister went to the potter's house, and as the potter had said, the donkey began to talk soon after midnight.

'You silly potter, I asked you to go to the king, instead you have brought the minister. You have not obeyed my order. If the minister is wise he will be able to arrange the marriage but if he is foolish

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and does nothing, he will be sorry for it.'

The donkey went on and on, talking in the same strain till day-break. The minister was astounded. He went straight to the king's palace and told the king everything that had happened during the night. On hearing the strange story the king decided to go himself to the potter's house. 'I shall go there myself and hear the mysterious creature talk,' he said.

That night both the king and the minister went to the potter's house. At the first stroke of midnight the donkey began to talk.

'It is a good thing that both the king and the minister are here. Marry me to your daughter, O! king. I shall do anything you ask me. I can raze mountains; dry up oceans; and turn deserts into green pastures. I can make raindrops fall upwards and make pots out of sand. I can create new countries; I shall do anything you ask me if you will marry your daughter to me. But if you do not then I shall destroy your city. I shall create havoc. I shall kill you,' ended the donkey with a shout.

Both the king and the minister became more and more amazed as they listened to the donkey talking in this way. They felt sure that it was not an ordinary donkey but some celestial being who had assumed a donkey's form. The king decided to set it such an impossible task that it would not be able to perform it, and perhaps he would then cease talking about marrying the princess. So after thinking hard the king said: 'I shall fulfil the word I give you to marry my daughter to you if you build a wall of copper with gates



As he raised his foot he heard a small voice
crying 'Stop! Stop!'



‘Marry me to your daughter, O King! I shall
do anything you ask me’

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of lead, in one night, round my city.'

To this the donkey readily replied, 'I shall do what your majesty asks me but you must facilitate my work by putting a rope round the city showing where you want the wall, and leaving a space to show where you want the gates. You do that by tomorrow evening, I shall build the wall during the night, and the next day I shall marry the princess.' The king agreed to do so and with his minister left the potter's house.

The next day the king ordered a rope to be placed round the city with an opening for the gates. It was ready that night and the king ordered the town crier to warn the people not to leave their homes during the night on penalty of death.

As night fell the son of Indra assumed his celestial form and summoned Vishvakarma, the heavenly architect to his presence. He ordered him to build the copper wall, with gates of lead, round the city as the king desired. Vishvakarma bowed his head in obedience, and before morning the task was completed. He made the wall of copper with a silver border on the top and the gates of lead.

At sunrise when the people woke up they were overcome with wonder at what they saw. The sun's rays fell on the polished silver and its reflection dazzled the whole city. The king too was amazed. He felt sure that the beast was some mysterious being and if he did not give him his daughter he would be sure to destroy his city and kill him. The king, therefore, decided that it would be wise to keep his word.

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The princess had two very dear friends, one the daughter of the chief minister and the other, the daughter of the court poet. These three friends were so deeply attached to each other that they had decided to marry the same person so that they could live together. When the princess, therefore, was married to the donkey the other two insisted on being married to the same bridegroom.

When the donkey bridegroom, Gardabhsena as he was called, arrived to marry the princess, the whole city flocked to see the sight. Some abused the king for sacrificing his only daughter, and such a beautiful daughter too, to such an ugly beast. Some praised him for keeping his word and thus saving the city from destruction. They said kind and unkind things; and the king listened to them without comment and outward indifference, but with sorrow in his heart.

A palace outside the city was specially prepared for the donkey and his brides. The donkey was very happy. In the day time he would go out to graze in the fields around the palace and return at night, when he would assume his celestial form and spend a happy time in the company of his wives.

So days passed. After some time the queen thought she would visit her daughter to find out how she was. She had imagined her living in utter misery and shame, and it pleased her very much to find her daughter radiant with joy and happiness. And when she learnt that the princess was soon going to be a mother her wonder knew no bounds. She could not contain herself any longer and said, 'My dear child,

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I have worried about you every day and all night, wondering what your thoughts could be, and how miserable you would be, living with a donkey. But what do I find? You seem to be very happy. Tell me how that can be. Tell me the secret of your happiness.'

At first the princess would not say anything. She tried to talk of other things, but when she saw that her mother was persistent and was not going to be satisfied until she knew the truth, she replied, 'You need not be unhappy on my account, dear mother! The one I have married is not a donkey at all but is the son of Lord Indra himself. He has assumed his present form because of a curse. After sunset he assumes his own celestial form and so I am quite, quite happy.'

When the queen heard this she eagerly awaited the moment when she would see for herself what happened in her daughter's home each night.

When night came the donkey returned from the pasture. He entered the palace and cast off his outer covering of a donkey and threw it in a corner. No sooner had he done so than there appeared a handsome youth, resplendent with celestial beauty. The queen was very happy to see such a son-in-law. A thought suddenly came to her. If she destroyed the empty shell of the donkey, lying in the corner, the young god would have to keep to his own form as there would be no donkey's body to go to. This thought worried her till at last she decided to act.

One night she quietly took the donkey's body away and threw it into a big fire she had previously had

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prepared. As soon as the body was thrown into the fire the son of Indra knew it, and he hurriedly called his wives and told them that they must run away from the palace as fast as they could go. 'Some one,' he said, 'has thrown my earthly body into fire. I, therefore, cannot remain on earth. My curse is at an end. I must return to my heavenly abode. This city, which was built through a miracle will also be destroyed by fire which will spread for miles around. So go away from here as quickly as you can.' As he finished speaking an aerial car descended from the skies and the prince sat in it and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

The three wives did not stop for a moment to talk to anyone but fled from the palace and ran as fast as their legs could carry them. They had not gone very far when they saw the flames and knew that the city was on fire. They redoubled their speed. The fire raged with mad fury, leaping to reach the sky and licking it with its thousand tongues. It could be seen from miles away. The sight made the women hurry on and on till they reached a thick forest. There they came upon a hermitage, and so exhausted were they, that they decided to seek refuge there. The sage in charge of the hermitage heard their story and tried to calm and pacify them. He allowed them to live in the hermitage and treated them with great kindness.

In due course the daughter of the minister gave birth to a son who was named Bhartruhari. Astrologers were consulted, who announced that his stars

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were so powerful that the child would be a king one day.

After a few days the princess too gave birth to a son. Once again the astrologers were summoned; and they predicted great things for the child. 'He will do great deeds and be like Lord Indra himself,' they prophesied, and so he was named Vikram, which means the brave. A few days later the poet's daughter gave birth to a son, who was named Prabhava. He too had his horoscope made and the astrologers said that he was going to be a learned man. 'He will understand even the language of the birds and the beasts. He will know the secret of the future and will be able to foretell it.'

The three children grew up in the hermitage and were the delight of the young and the old. While playing in the forest one day Prabhava got lost. He went by himself far into the forest and came to a gipsy camp. The gipsies, finding the child alone, carried him away. When he did not return, there was a hue and cry, and every inch of the hermitage and the forest around was searched, but no trace of the child was found. After a time they gave up all hopes of seeing him again. When Bhartruhari and Vikram were about fifteen or sixteen years old another incident happened which further broke up the family. Some brahmins were invited to dine at the hermitage; and while they were there Bhartruhari and Vikram who had gone out hunting in the forest returned with their game. The brahmins were very unhappy to see the slaughtered animals, and felt that they could not eat at a place where such innocent

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animals were killed. So they prepared to leave the ashram without having any food. The old sage was very miserable. He persuaded the brahmins to stay; and at last the brahmins agreed on condition that the young boys were turned out of the ashram. This made the old sage still more unhappy; for he was placed in a very awkward situation. He did not wish the brahmins to go hungry nor did he wish to turn out the young lads. The boys, however, came to his rescue and saved him from his dilemma. With folded hands they told the sage their intention to leave the ashram as they were now old enough to fend for themselves. They then bade farewell to their mothers, asking them to be brave and not to be anxious about them. The mothers, with tears in their eyes, permitted them to depart. They blessed them and assured them that they would always pray for their safety and for their welfare.

The two boys wandered about for many days till at last they reached Ujjaini, the chief city of Malwa. It happened that the king of Malwa had no children; and as he grew old he became more and more anxious for an heir to his kingdom. One day he went to the temple of Mahakal and worshipped the Great God and prayed for some light as to how he should find a successor to his throne. The Lord of Uma was pleased and asked the king not to worry.

‘Tomorrow morning,’ he advised, ‘order your chief elephant to be taken round the city with a golden pot full of water in its trunk. On whomsoever the elephant pours water from the pot, make him your successor.’

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The king carried out these instructions the next morning. The elephant went round the city and came up to the two brothers, Bhartruhari and Vikram, who had just arrived in the city. At the sight of the youths the elephant stopped and poured the water over Bhartruhari, who was promptly taken to the king. The king was overjoyed to see this handsome youth and, on an auspicious day, placed him on the throne and left the city and all his worldly possessions, for a retired life in a forest.

Thus the prediction came true and Bhartruhari became a king. He made Vikram his chief minister, and together they ruled the country well. Bhartruhari made a good king and was sought in marriage by many lovely princesses; and he married several of them. There was, however, one among them who became his favourite queen. She had great influence with the king, but the only rival she found for the king's affections was his brother Vikram. Bhartruhari would do nothing without consulting Vikram; and this made the queen very jealous and she secretly conspired to get rid of him. She told evil stories about Vikram to the unsuspecting king. But when she failed to turn the king against his brother she told him that she would not stay in the same palace with Vikram and the king must choose between her and him. The king was helpless against the woman's wiles and exiled his brother from his kingdom.

Vikram cheerfully obeyed the king's orders and set out on his wanderings once again. He saw many countries, visited many holy places and bathed in many a sacred river. Thus wandering he came to

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a dense forest. It was getting dark and a storm was rising. The wind was blowing with terrific force; and the thunder roared and the lightning flashed. Suddenly the lightning lit up a gipsy camp close by and he went towards it with the hope of finding some shelter. He stood behind a tree to see who the people were. They were all sitting round a fire under some sort of a shed they had erected, with their swords and spears beside them, ready at hand, to fight off any one who attacked them. All the gipsies looked very fierce and savage, with the exception of one, a young man who seemed to be more civilized and somehow very different from the others.

As they were talking the wild dogs, lying around the camp, began to howl and bark. They made so much noise that the gipsies asked the young man what was troubling the animals. The young man seemed to understand the language of the beasts and he replied that the animals were crying because a thief had come near the camp. On hearing this the gipsies jumped up to search for the thief. Vikram feared that they might take him for a thief and kill him without waiting for an explanation; so he hurriedly climbed up a tree and sat hidden among the branches. The gipsies searched everywhere and when they found there was no one they returned and sat round the fire again.

After a while the animals began to howl again and the gipsies asked the young man, 'What is it now?'

'The animals say that the river is in full flood

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and the dead body of a woman is being carried down the stream by the floods. It will pass by this place very soon. There are valuable ornaments on the body of the woman. The animals on the bank of the river are crying for the body to be dragged out so they can have a feast.'

It was a terrible night. The wind howled and whistled like one mad with fury ; flashes of lightning lit up the angry skies and thunder roared and echoed through the trees. The rain had started pouring in torrents. On such a night, who would dare to jump in the river and drag out the corpse of a woman ? And yet Vikram was curious. He wished to go to the river and find out if what the young man said was true, and he would try to bring out the dead body. He climbed down from his tree and went towards the river. When he reached the bank he saw in a flash of lightning the angry swollen river and a dead body coming rapidly down stream. It was not very far from the shore so without a moment's hesitation he jumped into the water and after struggling hard brought the body out. The body was covered with rich ornaments—bracelets, anklets, necklaces and earrings, all studded with diamonds, rubies and precious stones. He removed all the ornaments and tied them round his waist and leaving the body on the shore returned to the gipsy camp to get some warmth and also to see what would happen next. **NAWAB SALAR JUNG TALPOTI**

He had hardly reached the place when the animals began to howl again. The gipsies asked again, ' Why are the animals howling again, what now ? ' The

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young man replied that the animals were very happy as a brave man had dragged the body of the woman from the water. They blessed him for providing them with food, and said that one who had saved them from hunger would rule over the world and enjoy sovereignty over the nine continents.

The gipsies wondered who the man could be who dared to do such a thing on a night such as this. Their talk was again disturbed by the howling of the wild creatures. 'Well, what is it this time?' asked the gipsies.

'The animals say,' replied the young man 'that some danger threatens our chief—some one will rob us of all our goods. There will be deception and we shall be arrested for no reason.'

When the chief of the gipsies heard this he was frightened. 'Let us not stop here for a minute,' he ordered. 'It is long past midnight. Let us start at once so that we can reach safety in some town without delay.' The gipsies hurriedly got ready and moved on.

Vikram thought, 'Now is the time for action. If what the young fellow says is correct then my stars are in the ascendant, and I must try my luck now.' He quietly joined the gipsy caravan and without being observed walked behind a wagon. While walking a thought struck him and he opened one of the bales on the wagon and put one of the bracelets he had taken from the dead woman, inside and closed it. Then he opened another bale and put in an anklet and closed it. In the third one he put half of the necklace; and in this way he distributed half

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the ornaments in different bales and kept the other half with him.

Before dawn they arrived at a town. As soon as they were near the gates Vikram raised an alarm and began to shout for help. He complained that he had been robbed by the gipsies. The gate-keeper and the other watchmen came running, and when they heard Vikram accusing the gipsy chief of robbing him, and the chief denying the charge, the watchmen took them all into custody and locked them up for several hours. In the morning Vikram and the chief of the gipsies were taken before the king.

Vikram told the king that he was a merchant dealing in precious stones; and that he was travelling with the gipsies. When the chief found out who he was he had ordered his men to take away what he had.

The chief, however, denied the story. 'This is a lie, your Majesty,' he said in protest. 'If your Majesty will examine my goods you will know for certain that I have no jewellery with me and therefore, I have taken nothing from him.'

The king ordered all the bales on the gipsies' wagons to be opened. There they found an anklet, a bracelet, an earring, half of a necklace and many other jewels. Vikram claimed all as his. The chief was amazed to find these articles in his goods. He could not give any explanation for their being there but stoutly replied, 'If these are yours show the other halves of the pairs. Only then can you claim them, otherwise they might as well be mine.' Vikram immediately produced the other halves and the king

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was convinced that the gipsy chief was a liar and a thief. By way of punishment he deprived him of all his goods, which he gave to Vikram. Vikram, however, turned to the chief and said, ' Friend, I have no desire to keep all these things which do not belong to me. I shall restore them to you on one condition, and that is if you allow me to keep the young man who is with you.'

The chief agreed to this bargain and departed with his camp, leaving the young man with Vikram, who had now recognized the young man as Prabhava, his long lost brother. Prabhava knew Vikram too, and the brothers embraced each other with love. Vikram then presented the precious ornaments to the king and departed for Ujjaini, as the two brothers had now decided to go to join Bhartruhari, their third brother. Both of them had many things to say to each other and the journey was thus very pleasant. On the way they met with good omens, and Prabhava, who knew the future, told Vikram that he was soon going to be a king.

' If I become a king then I shall make you my Prime Minister. I give you my word,' said Vikram.

After some days they reached Ujjaini, just after sunset, and found the city very hushed and quiet. It was dark and there were no lights anywhere. The streets were practically deserted. The few people they saw seemed to be in a hurry to reach their homes, and looked harassed and unhappy.

The brothers wondered what had happened. ' How can the city be like this when Bhartruhari is the king ? Or is the king dead ? ' they wondered.

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They thought they would find out the next morning. Meanwhile they decided to stop at a potter's home outside the city, and thither they went in search of the house.

The potter gave them food, and they sat talking to him, plying him with questions as to who their king was, and what he was like. They were surprised when the potter replied that they had no king. 'What!' exclaimed the brothers, 'no king? What about King Bhartruhari?'

'He has become an ascetic,' replied the potter sadly, 'and has left the city.'

The brothers pressed the potter to tell them all, so he said: 'The favourite queen for whose sake the king exiled his dearest brother proved unfaithful to the king. The king himself found her intriguing with the chief of his stables. It was a great shock to him that a queen on whom he had lavished so much affection should prefer a common groom to a king. Riches, pomp of state, love, all these are ephemeral things, said the king, and he left everything to go out into the wide world to find that peace of mind which he had lost. But before he went he sent his messengers far and wide, in search of Vikram, his lost brother. But there has been no trace of him. No one knows whether he is alive or dead.'

The brothers were very much affected by the potter's story. They pondered over the fate of man and the vagaries of fortune. As they sat talking there came a sound of sobbing from inside the house. Vikram jumped up and rushed in, and found the

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potter's wife crying her heart out, and he asked her the reason for so much distress. After a time the woman managed to reply between sobs.

‘Since the good king Bhartruhari left, this city has been harassed by Vaital, the great Vampire, who is the devil incarnate. He comes every night to the city and demands a youth as his food. He has threatened to destroy the city if his requests are not granted. The people have decided to give him one youth every night by turn from every house. Tomorrow it is my son's turn. He is the only son we have. If he goes it will break our hearts and break our home.’

Vikram tried to soothe her and said, ‘Do not worry about your son, I shall take his place tomorrow’. In reply to the woman's protest he added, ‘I shall kill Vaital even though he may be a devil. Have no fear, good woman.’

So the night passed. Before dawn Vikram got up and sat waiting for the summons to come from the chief minister. When the messengers came to fetch the potter's son, Vikram went instead. He went smiling and laughing like a happy bridegroom on his way to meet his bride. He was taken to the throne room where the court had assembled. Vikram calmly entered the room and sat on the throne. The courtiers were surprised at his composure and felt that here was a truly brave man. Then the chief minister bowed before Vikram, and with folded hands said : ‘You are the king for today and we are here to carry out your Majesty's wishes and orders.’

Vikram replied, ‘Since you acknowledge me as

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your king do as I ask you. By tonight decorate this city with illuminations, with festoons of flowers and evergreens to make it look as gay as possible. Prepare stalls, distributed at short distances, all the way from the main gate of the city to the palace, stalls laden with fruits and sweets and barrels of wine.'

The order was promptly executed and that evening the city looked beautiful and gay. There were stalls of delicious food and plenty of drinks. As the sun went down and the evening shadows lengthened and gradually mingled with darkness, the people hurried through their daily business and shut themselves up in their homes for the night. Not a soul was seen in the streets after dark. Vikram alone, with his sword ready to strike, stood waiting near the palace gate.

At the stroke of midnight the terrible form of Vaital entered the city. He was surprised to see the city so bright and gay and was pleased with the beautiful decorations. As he advanced he saw the stalls laden with food and drink. He began to eat and drink and as he ate and drank he felt more and more pleased. 'Today's king has treated us well, he has received us well,' he chuckled as he ate.

Thus in a happy mood he reached the palace gate where Vikram was ready to welcome him. At this Vaital was still more pleased.

'Who are you?' asked Vikram without fear as Vaital approached him.

'I am the great Vaital,' replied the demon. 'If I am angered, I am death incarnate. I can do what I like. I can take heaven itself to the netherworld.'

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I am the lord of fifty-two brave warriors. My exploits are innumerable. I am the devotee of the great goddess Harsiddha. I can become invisible and I know the secret of changing my form. You have pleased me with your hospitality, so ask for a boon and I shall grant it before I eat you.'

'I shall ask for it,' said Vikram 'if you give me your word that you will grant it.' Vaital gave his word. So Vikram said, 'Tell me how long I have to live? How many years, months, days and minutes?'

In the twinkling of an eye Vaital went to the abode of Brahma and returned with the information. 'Your life is one hundred and thirty five years, seven months, ten days and fifteen minutes long.'

Then Vikram said, 'Please go back where you have just come from and ask them if they can extend my life by a day.'

Away flew Vaital to the Brahmaloaka and prayed to Brahma, 'My lord! Vikram has made me very happy, will you not for my sake extend his life by one day?'

Lord Brahma laughed and replied, 'You fool! Is it possible to extend anybody's life even by a minute? Whatever length of life fate has ordained at the time of birth cannot be extended.'

Vaital felt very depressed. He returned and said: 'Please ask for something else. This cannot be done.'

Then said Vikram, 'If they cannot give me one day more, ask them to cut down one day from my life.'

Again Vaital went to Lord Brahma, who replied on hearing his request: 'Fool! why have you come

NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR



The deer held his court all through the night
and with sunrise everything vanished



As she was about to enter the hut, the king caught hold of her long hair and stopped her

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again? Did I not tell you that whatever fate has written cannot be altered. Not even a comma, nor a dot can be changed. You cannot extend life nor lessen it by even a minute.'

Vaital felt thoroughly abashed. He returned and explained to Vikram the great power and mystery of Fate. 'Ask for something else,' he pleaded.

'If fate cannot be altered then what can you do to me?' and with these words, and with his sword in his hand, Vikram rushed at Vaital and caught him by his long hair.

'You have killed my people. I am going to kill you today,' he cried. 'You were the death of many people, I am going to be your death. My life cannot be shortened so you can do nothing to me. You who cannot even keep your word, who would call you great?'

Vaital was taken unawares and now was at the mercy of Vikram. He pleaded, 'I acknowledge you as greater than I am. Out of regard I gave you my word to grant you your desire; now I am bound to you for life. If you spare my life I shall remain your servant forever. I swear by the sun and the moon that I shall keep my word.'

'Swear that you will appear whenever I summon you,' replied Vikram, 'and that you will do whatever task I give you to do.' Vaital took the oath and Vikram allowed him to go and he disappeared.

Early the next morning the people came out of their homes. When they heard that Vikram was alive and that he had vanquished the great demon who would not return to the city any more, they

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were overwhelmed with joy. They proclaimed Vikram their king. There were great rejoicings when on an auspicious day he was anointed as the ruler of Ujjaini. He made Prabhava his chief minister and sent for his mother and Prabhava's and Bhartruhari's mothers who were all still at the hermitage. When they arrived Vikram and Prabhava received them with great love and respect.

‘Such was the great King Vikram, the descendant of Indra and a valiant hero. If you are like him, O, King Bhoja, then only think of mounting this throne. Otherwise misery will be your lot.’ The little figure ceased to speak. The king was astonished to hear this wonderful tale. The auspicious moment to mount the throne had passed, however, and the king had to postpone it to another day.

3

The Story of the Black Deer



ING Bhoja consulted his astrologers once again to find an auspicious day for him to mount the throne. At the appointed time as he was about to mount, he heard a voice cry, 'Stop! Stop!' The king hurriedly withdrew his foot and said 'Who speaks?'

'My name is Nanda,' said another statuette. 'This throne belonged to the great Vikram. He was a brave and magnanimous king. He alone who is equally great and equally magnanimous can ascend this throne. Any other who dares to sit on it will bring sorrow to his house.'

'Tell me,' asked the king eagerly, 'what Vikram did to earn such greatness.'

'Listen, O, king!' replied Nanda. 'In the city of Ujjaini, the renowned capital of Vikram, there lived a woodcutter. He was a very poor man. He went every day to the forest to cut wood and brought it to the city to sell. One day he went far into the jungle and when he was ready to return it was evening. As darkness increased the wild animals of the jungle came out of their lairs, and he heard their growls and roars. The woodcutter was frightened. He thought it safer to climb a tree and pass the

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night in the jungle than to take the risk of going home and meeting a tiger or a wolf on the way. He climbed up a large banyan tree and took shelter for the night on one of the branches. As it grew darker he became more and more frightened and he began to imagine things. The smallest noise made him start. The forest became alive as the night grew. He heard animals prowling through the jungle, and he saw the eyes of a tiger shining like two burning coals. Sleep was impossible. All the time he sat there, his heart beat wildly. What would happen to him if he fell from the tree in his sleep! He would make a good meal for the hungry beasts prowling below! The thought kept him awake, and he began to count every second and every minute of the night.

At midnight he saw seven men coming through the forest, carrying a flaming torch. By the light of the torch he saw them carrying what looked like a throne. They came near the very tree in which he crouched hidden, cleared the leaves away, and placed the throne under the tree. Suddenly a black deer appeared. His black shining coat looked like velvet; his tiny horns were of gold; and he had a wonderful necklace of precious stones round his neck. The moment the deer sat on the throne, the whole forest changed as if by magic. Instead of the trees there appeared tall houses and the lofty mansions of a big city. Under the tree the deer held its court like a king. The woodcutter rubbed his eyes. He did not know whether he was dreaming or if what he saw was real. He pinched himself to make sure

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he was awake. The whole night the black deer held its court. The night wore on and no sooner had the golden rays of the sun touched the city than it disappeared and once again there was a forest in its place. The deer too descended from the throne and vanished and with it the throne dissolved in the air. The woodcutter slowly came down from his tree. He could not understand what he had seen.

‘I shall be taken for a fool if I speak about it to anyone,’ he thought.

What he had seen, however, was so wonderful that he had to tell someone. When he reached home he told his wife about the happenings of the night. The wife refused to believe him.

‘It must be a dream or you must have been caught in the snare of some sorcerer,’ she said. ‘If, however, it was really true as you persist in saying,’ she added, ‘then it will happen again tonight. Let us both go to the jungle and find out.’

So it was that by sunset the woodcutter and his wife were sitting on the banyan tree in the forest. With bated breath they waited for midnight. At the appointed time the seven men appeared with a torch, bearing the throne. They cleared the ground below the banyan tree and set the throne down. Then the black deer with the golden horns arrived and no sooner had it mounted the throne than the forest disappeared and in its place was a big city in all its grandeur. The deer held its court in the great city all through the night and with sunrise everything vanished. The woodcutter and his wife went home. The woman was now as puzzled

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as her husband. She too could not understand whether this was magic or some impish joke, and she advised her husband to go to the king and tell him the whole story. The king when he heard it, was also inclined to be sceptical, but promised to find out the truth. He asked the woodcutter to accompany him to the forest that night, and made him promise not to tell anyone what he had seen.

Before it was dark, the king, armed with his sword and his bow and arrow, accompanied by the woodcutter, reached the forest and climbed the banyan tree to take up his vigil. At the stroke of midnight the seven men appeared with their torch and the throne. As soon as everything was ready, the black deer with the golden horns arrived as usual. As it sat on the throne, the forest turned into a city and the proceedings of a royal court began.

King Vikram was overcome with surprise. He felt that the deer was some god in disguise, and decided to kill it and find out the truth before it had time to disappear. He raised his bow and released an arrow which struck the deer, and it fell. The king hurriedly slid down the tree and went to the deer. All this happened in the twinkling of an eye. The courtiers saw the deer falling, pierced with an arrow and before they could do anything they saw a stranger standing by its side. They rushed at him and would have killed him but the deer stopped them.

‘Stop!’ cried the deer, ‘listen to what I have to say. I am the son of Indra. I was cursed by my father to take this form. I begged him for mercy

The Story of the Black Deer

and to save me from this curse. So he said that I should wander all day in the forest but at night I should rule over a big city. He said that I should be free from this curse and go back to heaven the day King Vikram pierced me with an arrow. The time has come for me to go back to heaven. This city and everything that belongs to it will remain for King Vikram.' As the deer stopped speaking an aerial car descended from the heavens and carried the son of Indra back to his home.

King Vikram then mounted the throne and asked the woodcutter to take as much wealth as he liked from the city treasury. The woodcutter, however, was not pleased with this bargain and looked unhappy.

'My good man,' said the king, 'you do not seem satisfied with your reward. Tell me what more can I do for you.'

'My Lord!' replied the woodcutter, 'if I had killed the deer all this kingdom would have been mine.'

The king smiled and replied. 'I have no desire to make you unhappy, and to enjoy this kingdom myself. You take it and be happy.' The king placed the woodcutter on the throne and returned to Ujjaini.

'Such was the brave and magnanimous King Vikram,' finished Nanda. 'He who is like him alone can mount the throne.'

Once again King Bhoja had missed the auspicious moment and he had to wait for a more propitious time.

The Story of the Brahmin

ON the day fixed by the astrologers King Bhoja was about to mount the throne. He had raised his foot when a voice cried 'Stop! Stop!' The king hastily withdrew his foot and asked, 'Who are you?'

'My name is Subhadra,' replied another statuette. 'This throne belonged to the great and magnanimous King Vikram, the conqueror of the Huns. His heroism and magnanimity were unparalleled. No one can sit on this throne who is not like him. If he does he will be unhappy. I am, therefore, warning you.'

The king, with folded hands, asked Subhadra what Vikram had done to be worthy of so much praise. The figure replied, 'Listen, O king! In the country of Malwa there was a city called Ujjaini on the lovely banks of the river Kshipra. In that city lived Vikram and ruled over the people, who were very happy. The king made it his business to see that his people were well looked after and were happy in his kingdom. Once the king went out hunting. While chasing a deer he outstripped his retinue and went far into the forest. The deer managed to escape and disappeared amongst the trees. The king suddenly realized that he was by himself and night

The Story of the Brahmin

was approaching fast. He began to look for a place where he could spend the night in safety. Looking around he saw a narrow path and followed it till he came out of the forest. In the distance he saw the lights of a city, so he spurred his horse and soon reached its outskirts. There he saw a hut, and the king decided to ask for shelter for the night. He knocked at the door which was opened by a brahmin. The king asked if he could have something to eat and a place to sleep in.

The brahmin welcomed the stranger and gave him food. When the king had eaten and felt refreshed the brahmin said that he had no extra bed to offer, but he was welcome to his bed, for he would sleep on the floor. The king refused to deprive the brahmin of his bed, and said he would prefer to sleep on the verandah outside, near the door where he had tied his horse. He then put the saddle under his head and tried to sleep on the hard floor, but in vain. He was very tired and was unable to sleep.

At midnight he was startled to hear a rustling sound, and saw a beautiful woman approaching the door. The king jumped up, and as she was about to enter the hut he caught hold of her long hair and stopped her. 'Who are you and what do you want at this time of the night?' asked the king, thinking she was a witch and had come to steal the brahmin's newly-born child. **NAWAB SALAR JUNG RAHMAN.**

The woman looked surprised and replied, 'What can I say to you. It is a great wonder that you can see me. No mortal can see me except King Vikram, who is like a god, possessing all the qualities

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of a god. But you too seem to have the marks of a divine being. Could you be Vikram ?'

The king was astonished to hear this and said, 'I am Vikram. Pray tell me who you are.'

'My name,' said the woman, 'is Vidhatri—Fate. The brahmin has a child. Today is the sixth day after his birth and therefore, I have come to write his future on his forehead. Do not stop me. I must go to him.'

Vikram allowed Vidhatri to pass, on condition however, that she would return the same way. When she came out he asked her to tell him what she had written. She replied, 'The future I have written for the child is that till the age of five he will flourish and be a source of great joy to his parents. At the age of seven he will be about to be married. He will have taken the three rounds round the holy fire with his bride; at the fourth round a tiger will appear and kill him.'

The king was very unhappy to hear this and asked, 'How can you write such a cruel fate for the child'.

'It is not I who write it,' replied Vidhatri. 'I have to follow without question, blindly, what Dharmaraja, the Divine judge, asks me to write. No one can change a single letter of what is written, for it is the fruit of his action in a former birth that decides his fate in this. The child, therefore, will have to die at the age of seven.' Then Vidhatri went away.

The king felt very sad at what he had heard. The whole night his mind was troubled with the

The Story of the Brahmin

question whether fate was irrevocable or could a man conquer his fate. In the morning, leaving the brahmin's home, he said, 'I am King Vikram. I give you whatever I have with me at this moment for your kind hospitality. But I would like you to make one promise. When you decide your son must marry please come to me with this letter.'

The brahmin was overjoyed to know who his guest was. He blessed the king and gave him his promise to do what the king asked him, and the king left.

The child grew up and was the joy and pride of his parents. When he was seven years old the brahmin began to think of marriage for his son. He remembered the promise he had given to the king and so left for Ujjaini with the king's letter. On his arrival at the court he presented the letter to the king who remembered the brahmin and received him with great courtesy and kindness. The brahmin stayed at the court for a few days and then told the king the time had come for his son to marry.

'I have come to inform your Majesty, according to the promise I made you, that I have arranged my son's marriage,' said the brahmin.

The king remembered his talk with Vidhatri. He ordered his minister to go with the brahmin and help him to make grand preparations to celebrate the marriage. 'I shall come myself,' he promised, 'one day before the wedding.'

When the brahmin left, the king began to wonder how he could frustrate the workings of Fate. He made his plans and went with a big army to where the wedding was to take place.

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The wedding pavilion was beautifully decorated with lovely tapestry and garlands of flowers and leaves. King Vikram surrounded the place with his men and ordered them not to allow anyone to enter while the wedding was on. Inside the pavilion a steel enclosure was set up round the altar where the bridal pair were to perform the main ceremonies. It was so closely netted that not even an insect could enter. The walls of this steel cabin were decorated with pictures of animals, scenes from a forest hunt and other scenes. The king himself stood inside with a drawn sword. No one knew why all these precautions were taken; and the guests whispered and wondered while they waited.

With the arrival of the bridegroom the ceremonies began. Then came the rounds around the sacred fire. One, two, three and—a picture of a tiger on the steel wall came to life, and with a roar rushed at the bridegroom and killed him with one blow from its paw. Before the king, or his soldiers, or the guests could do anything the tiger disappeared as it had come. NEWAB SAHIB JUNG MALHOTRA

There was a great uproar among the people. No one knew how the bridegroom had been killed. No one had seen the tiger enter or go, only the king knew. The people then said many unkind things about the king. They said he had made all these preparations with a purpose to kill the child. When the king heard these and other words against him he became very unhappy.

The brahmin was so overwhelmed with grief that he had no desire to live and decided to take his own

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life. When the people heard this their anger against the king grew greater. The king tried to persuade the brahmin not to do anything so foolish but the brahmin would not listen.

‘My lord!’ he said, ‘it is the fruit of my former action. You are not to be blamed. So please do not be unhappy on my account but allow me to die in peace.’

But the king would not have it. He tried to console the brahmin and at last said, ‘Wait for one year. If I am not able to bring back the child to life within that period then you are at liberty to die. I shall not stop you then.’

The brahmin agreed, so the king ordered the dead body to be covered in musk and placed in a box. ‘Take great care of the box, and if I do not return within a year then you can take out the body and cremate it,’ ordered the king.

The king then entrusted the kingdom to his chief minister and set out in search of the nectar that would bring the child back to life. He set out with a determination either to find the nectar within a year or to go to the holy city of Benares and put an end to his own life there.

Days and weeks passed and the king wandered from place to place searching for the nectar. One day he arrived at a dense forest, tired and hungry. ‘I shall rest a while,’ thought the king, and sat under the shade of a banyan tree. He was not there long, before a black cobra came out of a hollow in the tree. The king was distressed at having his rest disturbed. He got up and resumed his walk.

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Seeing this the cobra cried after him to stop, 'Dear wanderer! Wait, I wish to talk to you. I wish to consult you about the pain I am suffering, and you are going away from me,' he complained.

The king was surprised to hear the serpent speaking, and asked him what troubled him. The cobra said, 'Brother! come and sit in the shade. I swear I shall do you no harm.'

The king believed him and sat down under the tree again. Then the serpent began his story.

'Because of my *karma* my body is suffering from a terrible disease. I cannot eat and even water is distasteful to me. Day and night my body seems to burn. I cannot even sleep. I have heard that there is a king called Vikram who relieves people of their distress. Do you know anything about him? And if it is true, tell me how I can reach him. When you have told me that you can go your way.'

The king was surprised to find that his name was known even in the serpent world. The cobra had asked for help and therefore, it was impossible for him to leave without relieving him of his pain. So the king asked him, 'If you were to meet Vikram, tell me, what would you ask him to do to relieve you of your pain?'

'I know, Sir, it is futile to ask even King Vikram, for who would allow me to live in his stomach at the risk of his own life?' sighed the cobra.

'I am Vikram,' said the king quickly, 'tell me what I can do.'

'I have never seen Vikram,' replied the serpent, 'but if you are really Vikram, will you relieve my

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pain by taking me to live in your stomach ? ’

‘ If living in my stomach will give you ease, friend, then you are welcome to enter it.’ Saying this the king opened his mouth wide and the cobra entered the king’s stomach and sat coiled up inside. He felt better at once and he thanked the king. The king was pleased and he proceeded on his journey with the cobra inside him.

Soon the king began to feel the effects of having a serpent lodged in his stomach. He could not eat and he could not sleep. He became pale and emaciated. But still he went on without making any complaint. A day came when he found it almost impossible to walk, and only by forcing himself was he able to continue. At last he struggled into a city called Sadavati, and as he arrived at the market place in the heart of the city he fell exhausted to the ground.

Now the king of Sadavati had two daughters, and no son. He was very fond of his daughters and brought them up like boys. They were both unmarried. One day the king was talking to them and asked them, ‘ Do you believe that what you enjoy today is due to your *karma* or is it really due to the affection I have for you and therefore, to what I do for you ? ’

The elder princess replied, ‘ My lord ! I believe that whatever I am is entirely due to you. It is due to you that I enjoy all this wealth, these beautiful rich clothes and these costly ornaments. I also know that you will marry me to some good prince. My *karma* therefore, is tied up with your *karma* and,

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therefore is not different from yours. My destiny is really in your hands.'

The king was very pleased with the loyal sentiments of the princess and gave her his blessing. But the younger sister spoke out, 'You are mad,' said she, 'your *karma* is your own and my *karma* is mine. Everyone is subject to one's own *karma* and one's own destiny, and acts accordingly. One is happy or unhappy according to one's *karma*. It is selfish of my father to think that what his dependents enjoy is all due to him. The truth is that everything is due to one's own *karma*.'

The king was beside himself with anger. He felt that his daughter was ungrateful to him for all that he had done. He repeated the same question again and again, four times, but the princess gave the same reply. The king was so angry at what he thought was ingratitude from his child that he ordered his men to bring in the stranger whom he was told was lying in the market place.

'I shall marry you to him and see if your *karma* brings you enjoyment,' he said angrily.

The servants carried the unconscious Vikram to the palace. He looked a miserable being indeed with his swollen stomach and emaciated body and face. The king was very pleased. 'The uglier and the worse, the better,' he thought. 'That will teach her a lesson.' He then ordered his chief priest to perform the marriage between Vikram and his younger daughter. After the ceremony was over the bridal pair was taken to a half dilapidated house which was to be their home outside the city.

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‘Let us see how your *karma* works,’ the king said as the princess was leaving the palace.

To this the princess replied, ‘Hear me, O, father! you do not know the secret of the working of one’s *karma*. I have married this utter stranger but now he is a god to me. I shall love him and nurse him back to life. If my *karma* is good he will recover and even become a king.’

In her new home the princess began to nurse Vikram who remained in a comatose condition and was not aware of what was going on around him. The princess brought in hot water and gently washed him. This made him feel more comfortable and he slept peacefully. It had grown dark and the princess lit a lamp, and then sat by him quietly so as not to disturb him. As she sat watching she saw a strange thing happen. The king’s mouth opened and a large black cobra began to come out. It was half in and half out when the princess saw it. She was speechless with fright and could not move. Then from a corner of the house came another cobra. They looked at each other and the serpent from the corner spoke first and said, ‘You are a wicked serpent to give King Vikram so much trouble. The king is a kind and noble man. He serves humanity, and this is what you have done to him. I shall kill you if you do not come out. Don’t you see you will kill him? Come out!’ shouted the cobra.

To this the other replied angrily, ‘You call me wicked! If you are so good and virtuous why do you sit on that treasure there, and not allow anyone to come near it. Why don’t you leave the treasure,

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which is useless to you, and retire to a forest. I wish I knew someone who would act now. If boiling oil were poured into your hole where would you be ?'

This made the house-cobra very angry and he retorted, 'If only a doctor would come and give the king a drink of bitter bark boiled in butter-milk you would be cut to pieces and forced out of the noble king's body, and the world would be well rid of you.'

Then the two serpents began to fight, and at last one ran back to his hole in the corner of the room, and the other back to Vikram's stomach. The princess saw and heard everything and decided to follow the counsels of each of the serpents the next day.

Early in the morning she boiled some oil and poured it hot over the hole in the corner. The serpent came out with a hiss and died. The princess dug up the hole and found an immense treasure buried underneath. Then she bought some bitter bark, made it into powder and boiled it with butter-milk. When the mixture had cooled she poured it into the king's mouth. The medicine soon cut the serpent to pieces and he was forced out of his resting place. Vikram felt much better after this and as the days passed his pain subsided and his consciousness slowly returned.

At last one day the king opened his eyes and was astonished to find himself in a strange place, with a beautiful woman sitting by his side. The king asked her who she was and she told him her story. She told how she had incurred her father's displeasure and how he had married her to him, when he was found

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lying unconscious, and a stranger, in the market place. Then she told the story of the two serpents and how she had killed them.

On hearing that the princess had killed the cobra whom he had given refuge in his stomach the king became very angry and exclaimed, 'Killed them! You are a sinner to have killed them and if you have killed them for my sake then I am a partner in your sin. You may enjoy the wealth for which you have destroyed the other cobra, I shall have nothing to do with it. I am the one who believes in giving life so that others may be saved. I must atone for my sin. Give me the remains of the dead serpents.'

The princess had pushed the serpents' bodies away into a corner and she now brought them to the king. Vikram took two baskets and put the remains of each separately into the baskets, and then tied them to the ends of a staff which he could carry across his shoulders.

As he prepared to leave the place, the princess stopped him and said, 'You cannot go alone. I am coming with you. If you are the one who helps others in their distress then what about me? I am your wife. How can you make me so unhappy by leaving me?' The king felt sorry for her and replied, 'If you wish, you can come with me but I am going to Benares to die, in order to cleanse myself of this sin.' The princess said she too would do the same and so they left.

They walked and walked, and after some time reached the very place where Vikram had encountered the cobra. As they were resting under the tree they

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saw a large female cobra come out from its hollow. When it came near the king it started speaking, 'Good stranger! Listen to my tale of woe. I am separated from my son. Sometime back a traveller came this way. His name was Vikram. He allowed my son to enter his stomach. Is he happy there or not? Is he alive or has he been killed? Alas! I wish to know and no one can tell me.'

'Good mother,' replied Vikram, 'I am the man who gave refuge to your son. I tried to do him good, but unfortunately it has turned out to be otherwise. If you like I shall kill myself, and you can curse me if that pleases you,' and Vikram told her the whole story.

On hearing it the cobra replied, 'It is not your fault but the fault of the woman. Do not be unhappy. If you can tell me where you have thrown away the remains of the body, I have a miraculous substance which will restore him to life.'

Vikram was very happy to hear this. Here at last was the nectar he was searching for, so he asked her how much of the nectar she had with her and how many beings she could bring back to life with it. The cobra replied, 'I returned to my home to my father's palace in the nether regions. My father told me that as I was married on earth, entry into the nether world was forbidden to me and I would be reduced to ashes if I tried to get in. My mother was very unhappy at the prospect of never seeing me again, so she gave me this immortal nectar as a gift on parting. It is enough to restore to life my husband, myself and my son if any one of us

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dies. You have to rub the body with just one pin-drop of this ointment.'

The king was still more pleased to hear this and said, 'If you give it to me I shall bring you the remains of your son's body. I do not ask it for myself but for someone else. First I would like to restore your son and then, the other cobra which was guarding the treasure, and thirdly the son of a brahmin who died in very tragic circumstances.'

The cobra was satisfied with the king's assurance and gave him the nectar. The king brought out the remains of the two cobras from the baskets and touched them with the nectar. The young cobra not only came back to life but his painful disease also disappeared. He went home with his mother after profusely thanking the king.

The treasure-cobra came back to life and returned to his post assuring Vikram that he was welcome to take as much of the treasure as he liked.

Having seen the efficacy of the nectar the king returned to where the brahmin lived. He reached the place a day before the year had expired. The brahmin was happy to learn about the king's arrival. The next day in the presence of thousands of people Vikram brought back the brahmin child to life. He then gave rich presents to the brahmin and left for Ujjaini with the princess.

'Such was the great King Vikram. He could even conquer fate. If you are like him, O King Bhoja, then only can you mount the throne.' By the time

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Subhadra had finished her story the auspicious moment had passed and the king had to wait for another day.

NAWAR SALAR JUNG MAHADUN

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IN the next auspicious day fixed by the astrologers, King Bhoja once again prepared to mount the throne. As he raised his foot he heard a cry, 'Stop! Stop! Do not sit on this throne.' Bhoja hastily withdrew his foot and bending down asked who was speaking.

'My name is Manvati,' replied yet another statuette. 'This throne belonged to the great and magnanimous King Vikram. No one who is not like him should dare to sit on it. If he defies the warning then he will be unhappy.'

'What did King Vikram do that others cannot do?' asked King Bhoja, his pride a little hurt.

'Listen, O King!' replied Manvati. 'King Vikram, the ruler of Malwa lived in the beautiful city of Ujjaini, situated on the banks of the holy river Kshipra. One night, as was his habit, the king went out in disguise to see what was happening in the city. He wandered here and there and at last came out of the city. As he was walking along he saw the light of a fire burning, and wondered who could have started it in that lonely spot. He hurried towards the fire, and when he reached it, he found a man preparing to jump into the fire.'

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‘Stop,’ cried Vikram as he caught hold of him and pulled him away from the fire. ‘What great sorrow makes you wish to destroy the life in your wonderful body? In the name of God tell me the truth.’

The unhappy man was upset at this intrusion. He abused the king, and cried, ‘Let me go. You don’t understand. You only make me unhappy. Go your way and think no more of me. You are a simple fool. Do you think anyone would wish to die if he did not have some great sorrow? I beg you to go away from here. What will you gain by knowing about my sorrow? You look like a thief. Why are you wasting your time here instead of doing your job? Go, before the night is out and do not worry about my fate.’

The king, however, would not let him go. ‘Whether I am a thief or not,’ he said, ‘you will find out later, but I shall not allow you to burn yourself unless I know the reason for such a dreadful decision.’

The unhappy man was angry, but he knew that the man would not allow him to do what he wished unless he told him the truth. So he replied, ‘Well, if you must hear my story, keep both your ears wide open and listen to my tale of woe. I am a brahmin, and live far away from Malwa. After finishing my education, I married a woman, both beautiful and good. But alas! she died soon after marriage. I loved her so much that my misery knew no bounds. Days passed and yet there was no healing of my sorrow. I ate, drank and slept; and went through each day with a great sorrow in my heart. One

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night I lay sleeping. It was the fourteenth day of the brighter half of the month of Vaishakh. I remember it so well. Towards morning a strange dream came to me. I was in a forest, it was three hours after noon. I was alone. Then I saw a very strange thing happen. I saw a she-elephant without her mahout. She looked like the consort of Airavat, the great elephant of Lord Indra, decorated with lovely ornaments, carrying a golden howdah studded with precious stones. As the elephant came near, I saw a woman sitting in the howdah, with a maid behind her holding a fan. How can I describe the beauty of that woman to you! Her lovely body had the slimness of a lotus stalk and her face was like the full moon! Her clothes too were wonderful. I felt sure she was some goddess or a celestial nymph from Lord Indra's court. So graceful and dignified was she! As the night of the full moon is the night among nights, so she seemed to me a woman among women. The moment I saw her I fell in love with her. She beckoned to me to go near her, but I was rooted to the spot, and worshipped her from a distance. She was holding a garland of pearls in her beautiful hands. As she came nearer she called to me, 'O best of brahmins! Your *karma* will change for the better from today. I shall put this garland round your neck and marry you. I shall give all my wealth to you and you shall be my husband.'

I could not believe that these words were meant for me, so I dared not go near her. She called me to her a second time. She called me again and

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again and I thought with wonder whether it was possible that she had fallen in love with me too. At last I moved towards her, and then I woke up, and found myself tossing on my old, broken bed. The dream had gone and with it the happiness I had felt. I cannot forget that lovely face. Every minute of the day it is before my eyes and at night it is in my dreams. I am stricken with love and do not know what to do. Who will understand my suffering, and there is no one who can remove it. I thought I should go to King Vikram. He is a great king and is always ready to help people in distress. With that purpose I set out for Ujjaini and am nearly there. But now my courage fails me. For what am I to tell the king? It was all a dream and what can the king do to remove my sorrow? Why should I distress such a good king? People will blame me and say that I have made up a story to test the king, and to draw a promise from him which he cannot fulfil. I have therefore decided that the best course for me is to die. I shall burn myself and my sorrow in this fire. This is the truth. Now go your way and let me die in peace.'

Hearing the story of the unhappy man, Vikram tried to console him. 'Have patience. I shall help you. Before this fire, I swear that I shall remove your sorrow. Give me a month's time. I shall marry you to the beauty of your dream within a month.'

The brahmin cried, 'Do you laugh at me in my sorrow? How can you do what even King Vikram cannot do? If you say this, thinking I can reward you with money, remember I have nothing. Even

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God himself cannot give me the happiness of my dream. How then can I ask it of a mortal being ? What shall I ask him ? Bring me the lady of my dream ? It would not be surprising if people thought me mad and laughed at me. So do not talk idly about doing something that is impossible. I thought Vikram alone was the one who undertakes even the impossible to help others. Now you seem to be another. Who are you ?

The king replied calmly to this outburst, ' Courage, brother, I am Vikram. I have wandered through my city all night. Your dream will come true, have no fear. You shall marry the woman you have dreamed of within a month. I shall neither touch food nor water till she is yours, and if I am unable to bring her to you within a month then we both shall prepare a fire here and burn ourselves.' The king at last persuaded the brahmin to go with him to his palace.

The night passed and with the morning King Vikram began to feel anxious. ' I have given the brahmin my promise, but is it possible to fulfil it ? ' So the king began to think. ' One month is a very short time, what will happen then ? I must pray to Goddess Harsiddha. She will show me some light and help me.'

That night Vikram went to the temple of the goddess, on the bank of the Kshipra river. He sat in deep meditation and prayed to the goddess for guidance, but she gave him no sign. The king thought that perhaps the only way to please her would be to offer her his head. He drew out his sword and

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was about to cut off his head when the goddess stopped him.

‘Stop,’ she cried, ‘why do you wish to kill yourself? What is your trouble? You have always served me well. With my help you know that you can do anything you like. You are a wise man. What ails you that you should behave in this manner, and wish to take your own life?’

‘You know my reason,’ replied the king. ‘Where is the need to tell you? Guide me to the woman who appeared in the brahmin’s dream and was about to marry him. Who is she and where does she live? I cannot live unless the brahmin finds her and marries her.’

‘Listen, O king!’ replied the goddess. ‘I shall tell you her name, and where she lives. But it is extremely difficult to reach her. Sinhaladesha is a wonderful country. The women, there, are eternally youthful, and every woman is a beauty. But no demon, or even a god, much less a human being can enter the country. It is so well guarded that whosoever tries to enter it dies an untimely death. Therefore, if you wish to live do not go to Sinhal.’

The king was overjoyed to know where he could find the beauty. With folded hands he prayed again, ‘Mother! Grant me this boon. Let me go to Sinhal to bring back the girl. If I cannot do so then I shall have to take my own life. Therefore, O great mother! Grant me this boon. Let the brahmin’s dream come true. I crave your protection, for I am going to Sinhal. Protect me on the way.’ Saying this the king prepared to leave.

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Then spoke the Great Mother, 'Good king, you are a true son to wish to keep your word at the risk of your life. I shall tell you what dangers you will encounter, so that you may be well prepared. The road to Sinhal is very difficult. There are five barriers to cross before you reach the shores of Sinhal. Each barrier is so well guarded that it is extremely difficult to pass it. At first you will have to cross a dense forest where lives a terrible giant. Whosoever tries to cross the forest cannot go through unseen by this giant. You must be very watchful. If you get past that barrier, the next one you come to is a forest surrounded by fire on all sides. Those who have attempted to cross it have been burnt to ashes. However, if you are lucky enough to escape alive you will reach the third barrier guarded by frightful birds of prey. These birds are carnivorous and watch with hungry eyes for human beings to come that way. There are millions of such birds and they strike swiftly. Then comes the fourth barrier which is a gate known as the 'Impassable Gate'. Near the gate sits a she-demon who lives on the flesh of human beings. She asks no questions, but kills anyone who comes to that fearful gate. If you can pass that barrier you will come to the borders of Sinhal. But the moment your foot touches the land you will turn to stone. There are many large stones scattered along the coast which prove the sad fate which awaits unwary travellers. The moment you breathe the air of Sinhal, or as it blows softly over you, you are changed into stone. If you can cross this barrier alive, O King, you will come to the chief city. But it is

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not possible to enter it easily. There are herds of wild elephants guarding the gates of the city night and day. There are thousands of them and they rush on all travellers, weak or fearless, and kill them with their tusks. I have told you the dangers you will have to face—are you still anxious to go?’

When Vikram said he was, the goddess spoke again. ‘You are brave and true, King Vikram. I will watch over you. Go, fulfil your promise and return.’

The king was very happy to receive these blessings and after bowing down to the goddess and thanking her for her gracious favour set out for Sinhal with a light heart.

He arrived at the first stage of his journey without any mishap. When he reached the forest he saw a huge giant whose body was like a mountain, with arms as long as the tallest palm trees. What could a mere mortal do before such a creature! He was sitting there with an iron pike in his hand. At the sight of the king he came rushing at him and caught him by the arm. With a voice like thunder he shouted, ‘At last my misery is at an end. I will kill you for I must eat. It is fortunate that you missed your way and are now in my power.’

‘I have not missed my way,’ replied the king. ‘I have come to kill you.’

Hearing this the giant laughed long and loud. ‘Yes, indeed, brother, you are going to kill me,’ he mocked. ‘You are so brave. With one blow I can kill you. So pray to your gods for you are going to die.’

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Vikram prayed to the great goddess and immediately he assumed a terrible form. He became bigger and bigger, and tearing up a great strong tree by the roots he struck the giant a heavy blow. The giant was taken by surprise, and for a moment was stupefied. He wondered who Vikram could be. 'He seemed so small at first, looked like a child, but how did he grow so huge and terrible? He cannot be a mortal being. I am sure he is a God in human form.' So thought the giant. But when Vikram struck at him again he was aroused from his stupor and, red with anger, he rushed at Vikram and the forest rang with the sound of their blows. They fought fiercely hour after hour but Vikram was not afraid. He had faith in the great goddess. At last their weapons were bent and broken and they grappled with each other with their bare hands. For four days and nights the fight went on and yet neither gave way. On the fourth day they found that the fight had carried them close to the giant's mansion. It was a beautiful palace. On the verandah outside there was a golden swing, studded with bright jewels. On it sat a lovely woman. The king was amazed to see such a woman in the giant's house. For a moment his attention was distracted, and in that moment the giant hurriedly entered his gate and closed it behind him.

Vikram, finding himself alone, assumed his normal size and looking through the gate spoke to the woman.

'You are too lovely to belong to this place, who is your father and who is your husband? How have you fallen into the hands of this wicked giant?'

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The woman replied, 'Kanakshekhhar the King of Kanakavati is my father. My mother's name is Kanakachandrika, and my name is Kanakshobhangi. There was a festival and I went with my friends to play in a cool, fresh garden. We were happy bathing in the cool waters. I was surrounded by my friends when this wicked one appeared. Like an eagle he pounced on me and carried me away. He brought me here, far away from my parents. I weep every day when I think of their sorrow. They must have given up all hopes of seeing me again. The only consolation I have is that, however wicked this giant is, he is kind to me and loves me as if I were his daughter. That is my story. But who are you? This giant will kill you. He has killed many who have passed this way. You will never escape him.'

Then Vikram told her about himself. 'I am King Vikram of Ujjaini. Lord Mahakaleshwar is the presiding deity of my house, and I am the devotee of Goddess Harsiddha. I have come on a mission and am on my way to Sinhal. I have fought this giant for the last four days. If you know the secret by which he can be killed, tell me.'

'My lord,' replied the princess, 'he is a very evil creature. No one can conquer him. He is a devotee of an evil spirit and has gone in to propitiate her. If the spirit is pleased, no one on earth can conquer him. If you promise to marry me I shall tell you the secret for his death.'

To this the king replied, 'You must remember that I live for others. I may give away my kingdom, my life, my wife or even my son if necessary so that

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others may be happy. I have no attachments. The woman I marry must therefore, do what I ask her to, and go where I send her, without a word of anger. If you promise to abide by this I shall marry you to my sword first.'

The princess promised and the king gave his word in return. Then she said, 'My lord, attend carefully to what I have to say. If the giant awakens from the trance he has fallen into while praying he will not be conquered. I can show you the shrine where he is worshipping his evil spirit. Follow me.'

She took a magic crystal with her which made even invisible things visible. She and Vikram arrived at the place where the giant was sitting in deep meditation. His eyes were closed and there was a smile on his face to indicate that the evil spirit was nearly propitiated.

Then the princess whispered, 'Stand behind him. As soon as he wakes up he will stretch and yawn and then get up to go round the altar. At that moment go near him with drawn sword, crying "Victory to the terrible Mother and death to the sinner" and strike at him. You must kill him with that first blow. If you fail, your life will be in danger, and he will kill you.' She handed the crystal to the king and left the room.

After two hours the giant woke up. The evil spirit was pleased. 'Rise up! Rise up!' she cried. 'I am pleased with you. You have won my favour. Take this sharp trident and kill your enemy.'

The giant knelt before the spirit with bowed head. At that moment the king rushed from behind with

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his drawn sword. He cried to his goddess, 'Victory to the terrible Mother and death to the sinner, take this sacrifice', and he struck the giant a terrible blow and killed him.

Vikram then returned to the princess who was anxiously waiting for him. When she heard the giant lay dead, she was beside herself with joy and knew that this was truly the brave Vikram, the great king of Ujjaini about whom she had heard so much. She felt confident that he would reach Sinhal and bring back the beautiful damsel, the Padmini, from there.

The giant had killed many people and had robbed many others of their precious possessions. The princess showed them all to the king. Then the king asked her to remain where she was till he returned. 'I shall take you back with me on my return from Sinhal,' he told her, and left the palace.

The king travelled with great speed, and after a day and a night he arrived at the second barrier. He could see from a long distance away the flames of the great fire, and as he drew nearer he could see it burning on all sides of the forest; and the heat was overpowering. He climbed a small hill and looked down on the forest to see if there was any opening between the flames where he could pass through. But there seemed to be none. The king wondered what he could do. 'I must find a way soon or else the month will pass and the brahmin will die,' thought the king. He remembered his friend, the brave Vaital, and summoned him to his presence. When he came, Vikram asked him to go to Lord

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Indra and request him to send enough rain to put out the fire. Vaital flew to the court of Lord Indra and reached it in a second. He prayed to him to send rain to help King Vikram. Lord Indra was pleased to grant the request and sent for the Rain God and bade him quench the fire so that Vikram could cross the barrier. 'Tell the Fire God also, on my behalf, to open a path for King Vikram to pass through,' he ordered.

Then Vaital went with the Rain God to the Fire God, to give Lord Indra's message.

The Fire God did as he was commanded and moved away, leaving a passage between the flames. The Rain God then sent enough rain to cool the passage and enable Vikram to pass through without being scorched. Thus with the help of Vaital the king crossed the second barrier.

After travelling for some time the king reached the third barrier. From a long way off he saw great birds flying in the air. 'If I go near they will kill me. I must find a way of distracting their attention,' thought the king. He collected some stones which Vaital carried. As they approached, the birds came flying towards them. The king cut his thigh and smeared a stone with his blood and threw it at the bird which came near him. The bird thinking it a piece of flesh went after it. Throwing more stones smeared with blood, here and there, the king walked on. If a bird came too near he killed it with his sword. So the birds kept away from him and he soon crossed the third barrier.

On and on the king went till he reached the gate

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called the 'Impassable Gate' where he saw a terrible woman standing before it, keeping a vigilant watch. Her skin was dark and tough like an elephant's, her lips were like those of a camel, her teeth like the tusks of a rhinoceros, her hair like the coils of a black serpent, and her eyes like the wheels of a chariot, forever going round and round. She looked such an evil sight that the king was astonished.

'How is it possible to defeat this devil of a woman and go through the gate?' thought the king.

As he stood wondering, the woman saw him, and she began to dance and clap her hands. 'Welcome! Your lordship will make a good savoury for me. Shall I put you in my mouth straight away?' She took hold of the king's hands.

'The scriptures say', thought the king quickly, 'that there are four ways of defeating an enemy, with sam, dam, danda or bheda, with sweet words, with money, with punishment and with secret plotting. I shall try the sweet words and see what happens.' He knelt down before her and said, 'Mother! my respects to you. You are the ruler of these regions and I have come to seek your refuge. You are worthy to give such refuge so I have come to you.' Then the king bowed low to her.

This pleased the demon and her anger vanished. She called the king to her. 'O stranger! come near me. I shall not eat you, but if you do not obey, then I shall kill you!'

The king felt safe and went and sat by her, and she began to ask questions. 'Are you a human being or a god? Are you looking for a woman or have

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your stars betrayed you and brought you here? Is your god displeased with you or have you to atone for some sin and have come to die? Have you missed your way? How did you cross the barriers guarded by the giant and the fire? How did you escape the birds, alive? Tell me the truth. Tell me your name and where you come from.'

To this the king replied, 'I live in Ujjaini, the chief city of Malwa. My name is Vikram. I consider it my duty to help those who are in distress. I have taken a vow to help others and, therefore, I am here on my way to Sinhal to fetch the Padmini for a brahmin youth who is dying for her. If any one tries to stop me in my mission I kill that person. I have killed the giant, I have quenched the fire. I have conquered the birds and now I have come to you with a hope that you will allow me to pass through this gate.'

'So long as there is life in me', replied the demon, 'you will never pass through this gate. The creator has not so far created anyone who would dare to disobey me. I also have taken a vow like you, that I shall put to death whoever comes here to pass through this gate. You have bowed to me, and therefore you are still alive. I advise you, O king! go back to your Ujjaini; your vow is not going to be fulfilled this time. You were able to fulfil other vows because you had not met me. Let that satisfy you. You will enjoy the merit of whatever you have done till now. Today you will have to break your vow. If I allowed you to pass I should be committing a terrible sin. So go back the way

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you came. Why ask for death unnecessarily ? ’

On hearing these words the king thought, ‘ Bowing and pleasing this woman has done me no good. I must change my tactics. I would not be a man if I did not show her my strength.’ The king’s face became full of anger and drawing his sword he struck her a hard blow.

The moment he did so a strange thing happened. The demon gave a loud and long scream. Even Vikram trembled to hear it. It was like terrible thunder, like the howling of angry winds—a thunder that shook the very heavens. Then began a fight between the king and the she-demon.

Vikram knew he would not be defeated but he thought, ‘ This woman will not be easily killed. It will take days and I have to finish my work in a short time. I must, therefore, think of some other device by which I can get over this difficulty without loss of time.’ He worked out a plan in his mind and when night fell he cried to the demon, ‘ Stop! I shall not pass through this gate. You may rest now.’ He went back a few paces and the demon began to laugh and mock at him. So he went forward again and said, ‘ I have decided to go to Sinhal and I shall go. My name will not be Vikram if I do not bring the Padmini here to see you on our journey back to my home.’

‘ Go away,’ shouted the demon. ‘ Be strong first; you should be grateful that I have not killed you yet. Give up, now, O great Vikram, for you will have to be born again to defeat me.’

Vikram walked backwards for a short distance till

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he was out of sight of the demon and then summoned Vaital to his presence. When he came, Vikram ordered him to dig an underground passage which would take him across the barrier without passing through the gate and therefore, without the demon's knowledge. Vaital did so and the king passed through it and thus crossed the barrier. Days passed and as the demon did not see the king again she thought he had gone home, and she was very pleased.

After travelling for some time the king reached the fifth barrier. The number of huge stones scattered along the shore made him realize that he had arrived at the place where even the air turned one into a stone. The king wondered what he should do. 'Even an underground passage will not help me here,' he thought, 'nor is this like fighting a giant. Here I have to fight the very air I have to breathe. I shall be petrified the moment the air touches me!'

At last he thought of a way. He ordered Vaital to prepare a steel barrel. Then the king gave him instructions as to what he should do. 'I shall go inside it, you then close the lid and see that no air can enter the barrel. Then push the barrel with all your strength so that it rolls across the danger zone into safety.'

Vaital did as he was told. The steel of the barrel was changed to stone, but nothing happened to the king inside. As soon as it passed over the barrier Vaital opened the lid and the king came out.

Before him in the distance rose the majestic fortifications of Sinhal. The king was very happy to know that he had come to his journey's end. There

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was, however, one more obstacle to overcome. As he drew nearer the city gates he saw herds of elephants wandering about. Seeing a stranger they rushed at him, trumpeting wildly. 'How can I fight them all together?' thought the king. 'They look like death incarnate, and yet I cannot afford to lose courage. I must fight them whatever happens.' With that determination, he rushed at them with his sword drawn, and struck at them with strong, quick blows. The first elephants, fatally wounded, shrieked with pain as they died. The others, hearing the shrieks, turned back and fled. Vikram and Vaital laughed with joy as the last obstacle vanished, and at last they entered the gates of the city.

It was a beautiful city, very like Amaravati, the celestial capital of Lord Indra. Poverty was not known there. There was peace and plenty in the land, for people worked and loved each other. The houses stood in cool gardens where green sandal trees, cardamom and clove, sweet flowers and fruits grew. The men and the women were beautiful and healthy. As the king walked on he heard strains of sweet music coming from every house. Vikram felt for a moment that he was in heaven. He was grateful to the gods for letting him live to see such a wonderful city. He went on and on admiring the place till he came to a garden, where women were playing a game. He entered the garden and watched them. One woman sat in the middle and others stood around. Vikram entered the ring and sat beside the woman in the centre. She looked surprised. With signs and gestures she asked him why he had come

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to the women's garden, and told him that the guards would kill him if they found him there.

To this the king replied boldly, 'Listen, O lady! you cannot frighten me. I have come to carry away Padmini and the whole country of Sinhal will know of it. I have not come for pleasure. I have passed through many dangers to come here, and I do not fear your guards.'

The woman was surprised to hear these words. She wondered if he was a god or a demon or some great man. One of the other women said, 'You are a mere mortal, how did you manage to enter this place? How did you manage to cross those barriers so difficult to pass? How did you manage to overcome the giant? Are you a god or a demon, for this is not the work of a man? What is your name? What brings you to Sinhal? And how did you know of Padmini who lives here. In the name of the twelve thousand women who live here tell us that. You must realize that Padmini cannot be found in the streets, nor can you buy her in the market; nor does she love any man nor you either. How then do you propose to carry her away?'

'I shall tell you my story,' replied the king. 'My name is known throughout the world. I live in Ujjaini and I find happiness in serving people who need help. I am the servant of the Goddess Harsiddha, and my name is Vikram. One day a brahmin youth saw Padmini in a dream and the moment he saw her, he fell in love with her. He has decided to die if he cannot find her. I have persuaded him to wait, and promised to find and

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bring Padmini to him within a month. That is why I am here. By the grace of the goddess, Harsiddha, I have passed all the barriers safely. Now tell me where I can find Padmini. I command you to tell me the truth.'

'I shall tell you the truth,' said the most beautiful of the women. 'I am Padmini. I saw the place you tell of in a dream. It was the fourteenth day of the bright half of the month of Vaishakh. I saw the brahmin youth and fell in love with him. I called to him, but before he came near me I woke up with a start, and the dream vanished.'

'At last I have found Padmini. I have seen her,' cried the king. 'I shall now go back. I am not afraid of your guards. They cannot harm me.'

When they heard these words the women whispered together—'He is indeed a king. He has braved great dangers to find Padmini. He is a perfect man! He is most handsome and noble. Here is a man fit to be one's husband. He has come through all these dangers to help another.'

In Sinhal it was customary for a woman to choose her own husband. Parents did not choose husbands for their daughters. So the twelve friends whispered to each other and decided they should all marry Vikram. 'Why should we seek others. We shall never find so great a man.'

They took the king to their home and to their parents, who, when they heard about the exploits of the king, were pleased. Parents, relatives and friends were all happy. They gave Vikram rich presents and prepared a great feast in his honour. But

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Vikram told them of his vow not to eat any food till he had returned to Ujjaini. He therefore asked for their permission to return as quickly as possible.

When they spoke of marriage the king said, 'The woman who promises to do what I ask her to do, first marries my sword. My vow is to help others in their distress. The woman who promises to obey all my commands, she alone can marry my sword. If I choose, I shall make her my queen or I shall give her away to another. If this condition is acceptable to you then you shall marry my sword.'

The twelve beautiful women of Sinhal accepted the condition and said, 'O king! We are yours to do with as you will. We shall carry out our promise.' They were all married to the sword of King Vikram with great ceremony. Each one received a present from her parents of a richly caparisoned elephant and rich jewels and clothes. Thus they set out for Ujjaini. The king wondered if he and his retinue would have to face the dangers once again at each of the five barriers but Padmini said, 'There is no need for fear now. The guardians at these barriers terrorize only those who try to enter this country, not those who are leaving it.'

After leaving the stone barrier they arrived at the 'Impassable Gate' where the she-demon stood. Vikram informed her that he had reached Sinhal and was taking Padmini with him. She was amazed and wondered how Vikram had passed through the gate. She praised him when he told his story and gave him a necklace of precious stones.

Passing quickly through the barriers of the birds

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and the fire Vikram soon reached the giant's home. He then took princess Kanakshobhangi with them and as much wealth as they could carry from the giant's treasury; and after a few days the king and his party arrived at the Kshipra river.

When the chief minister heard of the king's arrival with a train of elephants he spread the news through the town by the beating of drums, and the whole city came out to welcome the king. They were all amazed to see the royal procession—the elephants all richly decked and each carrying a beautiful woman. When the king reached the palace he sent for the brahmin youth and asked him to pick out the lady of his dream.

The brahmin was dumb with wonder at seeing so many beautiful women. He was too bewildered to speak. 'All these women and all this wealth,' he thought, 'but for me the king would never have gone there. Had I gone myself, all these would have been mine. Then why should I choose only one woman? They all belong to me.' The brahmin could not make up his mind as to what he should say. Again the king asked him to speak out without fear. Then the brahmin said, 'My lord! I shall tell you what is in my mind. You can kill me then if you please. When I described the beauty of my dream, if you had told me at once who she was and where I could find her I should have gone myself in search of her, and all these women and riches would have been mine. You left me here at home and went alone to find the woman. Thereby you have deceived me. This is not doing me a kindness.

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It is I who have helped you. If you had not met me you never would have found these women and this wealth. In truth they all belong to me. You intend to give me only one woman and take the others to your palace. Is that fair? Ask your people of Ujjaini to judge between us. Since you asked me to speak, I have spoken. You can kill me now.'

The king, instead of getting angry, was pleased with the brahmin's frankness and said, 'Yes, all these belong to you. You can have all these women and all this wealth, and may you be happy.'

On hearing this, however, the women cried out, 'My lord! We married you and not this brahmin. We have been born and brought up to live as royal princesses; to marry a brahmin is to live on alms some day.'

The king, however, reminded them of their promise to do what he asked them, and to go where he asked them to. 'You cannot go back on your word,' he said, 'but I shall see that you will never have to beg for alms.'

The king then gave them in marriage to the brahmin and gave them enough wealth to live on.

'Such was the magnanimous and great King Vikram. If you are like him then only can you mount this throne.' Then the figure was silent, and King Bhoja had to postpone the mounting of the throne for another day.

The Dumb Queen



ON another auspicious day once again King Bhoja prepared to mount the throne. As he raised his foot he heard the familiar cry, 'Stop! Stop!' The king hastily withdrew his foot and asked the statuette who spoke, 'Who are you?'

'I am Chitrangana,' replied the little figure. 'This throne belonged to the illustrious and magnanimous King Vikram. He was the embodiment of all virtues, a king who was not afraid to court discomfort to make others happy. He who is like him, alone can mount the throne. Anyone else who ventures to sit on this throne will never be happy.'

'Tell me,' said the king, 'what is this greatness of King Vikram? What did he do to deserve so much praise?'

'Listen, O king!' replied Chitrangana. In the great country of Malwa, was the beautiful city of Ujjaini where King Vikram lived and ruled. The king was wise and just and the people were happy. In the heart of the city was the great square known as Vikram Square. Among the many shops in that square was a humble pan shop. The best pan in the city was sold in this shop. The pan leaves were

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white like camphor or the kewada leaf, and the tamboli, the pan-dealer, knew how to roll them with all kinds of spices to make them taste delicious. A woman was a regular customer at this shop. She went there every day at the same hour and minute and paid a gold mohur for the best pan she could get in the shop. She would not make any bargain or even wait for the change. The tamboli could not understand her. He was afraid that some day her husband would find out that she bought pan from his shop, and paid so high a price. He would then think the tamboli was a cheat, and demand accounts from him. Now the tamboli had a brahmin friend; and he went to his house at night, when the shop was closed, and told him about his worries, and asked him to follow the woman and find out who she was and why she behaved so differently from other people. The brahmin promised to do as he was asked and to help his friend out of his difficulty.

The next day, the woman came at the usual hour, bought her pan, placed a gold mohur on the counter and left without a word. The brahmin who was watching her followed her at a short distance. The woman did not look right or left or even behind her but went on and on, and she did not notice the brahmin following her. She left the city gate and walked on till she reached a deep forest. There in the depths of the forest was a huge rock. On the left flowed the river Kshipra. She walked on till she reached a cave in the rock. She entered the cave and the brahmin followed her. When the

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brahmin reached the other end of the cave he lost sight of the woman. He found himself in a beautiful garden. He could hear sweet music and singing. As he wandered on he came to a huge well. A golden wheel was attached to it to draw up water. Round the well he saw young and beautiful women who had come to fetch water. They looked like celestial nymphs. They laughed and smiled, and while some were busy drawing water, others played games. Calling on the name of 'the dumb queen' they asked the wheel to turn and it began to turn. The brahmin was amazed. He saw many other strange things happen in the name of 'the dumb queen'. He was curious to know who this dumb queen was, whose name served as a magic charm. So when the women had filled their golden pots and started for their home, he stood before them and stopped them.

'Lead me to your dumb queen,' he said, 'whose name seems to bear a charm, that by merely invoking it you can do so many things.' 'Oh shame!' cried one of them. 'You do not expect the dumb queen to be walking in the streets, that we can show her to you! We are all her servants, working for her. You are a brahmin, therefore, we talk to you. Go the way you came or you will find yourself in prison. Our queen is a very virtuous woman. She has no time for idle strangers. Besides that she has taken a vow that whoever makes her talk four times will win her love. She will talk when she pleases. She surrounds herself with four screens. These screens can only be removed when she speaks with a man. It is, therefore, only possible for few men to get

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even a glimpse of her. So you had better go the way you came without wasting time'.

The brahmin was obstinate. He would not move or allow them to pass. 'Show me the queen', he persisted, 'or I shall die in front of you and my death will be on your heads.'

The maidens were frightened, and one of them went to the queen and told her of the trouble. 'A brahmin youth has come to our garden. He seems to have knowledge, but no wisdom. He will not go unless he sees you. What can we do to him? Can we imprison a brahmin?'

'Throw him in that pond,' the queen ordered, 'where he will become unconscious and then remove him from the garden.'

So the maid returned and told the brahmin, 'Sir! you must bathe in yonder pond first, before we can take you to our queen'.

The brahmin did not even wait to take off his clothes but jumped into the water. It was a deep pond and he was nearly drowned. He was taken out in an unconscious state and taken to Ujjaini and left near the tamboli's shop.

When he recovered, and opened his eyes, he was surprised to find himself near his friend's shop. Yes, it was the same shop, the same square and the same city, but it was dark and there was no one around. He rubbed his eyes and wondered if what he had seen had been only a dream. But how could that be? He had followed the woman. He had reached the lovely garden and had seen the pretty women drawing water. What happened then? How

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was he here ? He remembered. He had wished to see the dumb queen. At the thought of the dumb queen his desire to see her revived tenfold, and made him feel very unhappy. He remembered his words that he would commit suicide if he was not allowed to see her. The mystery surrounding the queen increased his desire to see her, and his inability to see her almost drove him mad. In this state of mind he thought it were best for him to die.

King Vikram was taking his habitual walk round his city that night. He arrived on the spot at the very moment the brahmin was trying to kill himself. The king stopped him: 'What is the matter with you, good Sir ?' he asked. 'Why are you lying in the dust ? Has anyone robbed you of your money or run away with your wife ? Or have your ships sunk that you are prepared to kill yourself ? Why don't you go to King Vikram and tell him about your distress ? You know of his vow to help remove sorrow from others. You had better go to him in the morning. He will surely help you.'

These words excited the brahmin still more and in a violent voice he shouted, 'What has it to do with you if I am lying here ? Do not speak to me of Vikram. He may be great to you. What can he do to help me ? He will give me money or food—as if that will relieve me of my misery. My misery is as vast as the ocean. What can the king do ? I am pining for a woman. He who is on the point of death must tell the truth. I shall, therefore, tell you my story.' The brahmin then told the story of all that had happened when he followed the

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woman to the garden beyond the cave. 'So please leave me, and let me die in peace. I can never be happy unless I see the dumb queen,' cried the brahmin.

Then Vikram told him who he was and reassured the brahmin with the words, 'I shall bring the dumb queen here; till then I shall not let water pass my lips'.

The brahmin was happy to hear the king's words and went with him to the palace where the king asked for more details, and asked him to show him the woman he had followed when she came to buy the pan.

When evening came, the king armed with his dagger and sword went to the pan shop accompanied by the brahmin. At the usual hour the woman arrived. The brahmin signed to the king. When she left the gold coin and walked away, the king followed her. He followed her through the forest till they came to the rock and entered the cave. When the king reached the other end of the cave he too found himself in the garden, illuminated with rows of light. He saw the well with the golden wheel and the women, who had come to fetch water, all beautifully dressed in garments of various colours, with gold pots on their heads. Then one of them asked the wheel to turn in the name of the dumb queen, and it began to turn. All that the brahmin had said was true. **NAWAB SALAF JUNG BAHADUR**

As the king silently watched the women, one of them saw him. She saw his handsome face and his noble bearing and knew he was a king.

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She hurried to the dumb queen to give her the news and seek her orders.

‘Some one very handsome, and even greater than you, has come to our garden,’ she said. ‘He stands there not speaking a word. If it is your Majesty’s desire we shall welcome him.’ When the queen told her to do so, she hurried back to the garden, and approached the king with folded hands and led him to a golden chair that stood waiting for him. ‘Our queen is in the palace,’ she said ‘and does not see any man, nor does she speak to him even from behind her four screens that hide her. She has asked me to welcome you and offer you any hospitality you need.’

To this the king replied, ‘Tell your queen that Vikram, the King of Ujjaini, has come to bring her out from her hiding.’

All the other women had now gathered round the king to see what was happening. When the king’s message was delivered to the queen she was very angry and sent word to him: ‘You may be king of Ujjaini. You may be great in your country. Here you are an intruder and, therefore, a thief. You are a truthful man and therefore I allow you to go. Go back where you came from, or else I shall throw you in prison.’

To this the king replied, ‘Who is this who talks of imprisoning me? How many like me have you imprisoned that you talk of throwing me too into prison? You will not find it an easy thing to do.’

The queen, when she heard this, asked her maid to take the king round the prison, so that he could

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see for himself the number of men already imprisoned. When these men saw Vikram some of them laughed at him, and said, 'You are the king who helps others in distress. Well, help us out of this, if you can.'

'I shall fulfil my vow and free you,' promised the king.

When he returned to the palace he asked his attendant why the queen kept herself hidden, and why she refused to speak to any man. The woman replied, 'Once on a festival of the Sun God, a number of heavenly nymphs met at the temple of the goddess to enjoy themselves. They were playing and made small dolls of clay. Some made ten, some twenty and some even more. One doll they made slightly bigger than the rest. When their play was over they prepared to go home. Before they went, however, they looked lovingly at the dolls and those looks gave them life. Then this beautiful garden was created for them to live in. The largest doll became the queen and the one a little smaller became her younger sister who will succeed her, and all of us serve them with joy. No man, not even a god can come to this place; if he comes he is put in prison the next day. The celestial nymphs have supplied us with enough wealth, so we need nothing, and there is no need for us to have any contact with the outside world. The queen has taken a vow not to speak to any man. The day she breaks her vow, she will be conquered by that man. If a young man comes here by mistake, he is warned, and if he refuses to take the warning he is put in prison. If, therefore, he is imprisoned it is entirely his fault. So

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think about it, King Vikram and go back while there is yet time. If however, you can make the queen talk four times in one night, the four screens that hide her from men will be removed and then she will come and sit by your side and do your bidding. But if you fail in your attempt to make the queen talk four times then the prison will be your home for the rest of your life. So please listen to us and be wise.'

The king thought for a moment and replied, 'Woman! I am not the man to run away from dangers. I have decided to stay. I shall sit here and tell stories, that is if your queen is fond of stories, for I shall not tell them to the attendants. She must come and listen, and she must tell me how she likes each one.'

'Are you mad?' interrupted the woman. 'How can she tell you? If she speaks her vow is broken.'

'Well,' said the king, 'I shall make her earring talk if she will not. But let her come and listen. Go, ask her on my behalf.'

The woman laughed, 'I thought you were a wise man, but you are no better than the others. If you think her earring will speak, well—however, I shall give your message to the queen.'

The king was happy to hear this. He summoned Vaital to his presence and asked him to enter the queen's earring and speak. The queen was also curious to know what would happen, so she consented to listen to the stories Vikram was going to tell. Four screens were placed between her and the king. When she arrived the attendants asked the

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king to begin. 'O earring of the queen!' the king began, 'listen to what I say and promise to comment on my tale so that I am assured you are listening.'

Immediately the earring replied, 'O great king, this queen is indeed a fool, or else she does not know who you are. If she knew she would not treat you like this. It is my great good fortune that I am asked to listen to you. Indeed I shall be attentive, and show you that I am.'

The queen and the maids were all amazed to hear the earring speak. They could not speak but sat silently listening to the story.

'Once upon a time,' began the king, 'there was a place called Melapur Patan, and the name of its ruler was Indraditya. There were four boys living in that city. One was a brahmin, the other a carpenter, the third a goldsmith and the fourth a weaver. They were very great friends and were always together. They found great pleasure in each other's company, and neglected their studies and their work. The parents of the boys would often get angry and scold the four children. The brahmin's father would tell his son that he was a fool, and would remain a fool, if he went on like this; the carpenter would tell his son that he was mad to neglect his work and would remain a blockhead; the goldsmith would ask his son what he was going to eat if he did not learn his craft; and the weaver would beat his son now and then.

'One day after a severe scolding from their parents they met together to consider what should be done.

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“It is true,” said one, “we have wasted our time in play and learned nothing. Let us all leave our homes and return after acquiring some knowledge.” To this the others agreed, and so without telling any one at home they set out in quest of knowledge.

‘They travelled a long way till they came to a big city, and decided to stay there for the night. They sent the goldsmith to get some flour and other food for the brahmin to cook. The goldsmith went to that part of the city inhabited by goldsmiths. He begged for flour and food from an old man. The boy told him that he himself was a goldsmith, and was in search of some one who would keep him as an apprentice, and teach him his craft. The old man offered to take him, so the boy promised to return the next morning, and went back to his friends.

‘The brahmin cooked the food and they all enjoyed a good meal. When the meal was over, the goldsmith told his friends his intention to stay in the city and learn his trade, if the others allowed him to do so. He told them of his arrangement with the old man who was willing to teach him. The friends agreed, so he went to the old man the next morning after the others had left.

‘After some days the three friends came to another city and decided to spend the night there. They sent the carpenter to get food, as well as fuel for cooking. The boy went to the locality where the carpenters lived. He got what he wanted from a man who had a kind face. He was interested when the boy told him he was a carpenter and would be happy to work as his apprentice, if he would take him. The

The Dumb Queen

man said he was willing to take him in, so the boy promised to return to him the next morning. After the meal he told his friends he intended to stay in the city, if they agreed. As the others had no objection, the carpenter stayed on in the city while the other two boys left the next morning.

‘The brahmin and the weaver walked and walked. They were very tired when they came to another city and decided to stay there for the night. They began to look for someone who would be kind enough to give them hospitality for the night. At last they found a place. It was a weaver’s house. After eating with the weaver they sat talking. During the conversation, the weaver boy asked his host whether it would be possible for him to accept him as an apprentice and teach him his craft. The weaver was very happy to do so, and so the weaver boy remained in that city and the brahmin boy went on his way.

‘The brahmin then walked on and on by himself till he reached the banks of the river *Narbada*. As he walked along the banks he saw a city, and on entering it he met a number of brahmin boys, sitting under a tree, being taught by a learned man. He joined the group. The pandit liked the boy and so allowed him to remain, and took him to his home when the lesson was over.

‘Every day the boy got up early, bathed in the river and served his teacher and listened to his teachings with the other boys. He became a favourite pupil and the pandit taught him everything he knew. So twelve years passed; and the time came for the

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brahmin to leave. The teacher blessed him and sadly permitted him to go home.

‘On his return journey the brahmin halted at the place where the weaver boy had remained. He found him, and as the weaver was also anxious to go home he said goodbye to his master, and both the friends set out for the place where the carpenter was. The carpenter had also completed his education and was allowed to leave; so the three friends went on to the city where the goldsmith was undergoing his apprenticeship. He was very happy to see his three friends, and with the permission of his master, he too joined them on their homeward journey.

‘They had met again after many years, and so they had a great deal to talk about. They talked the whole day, and in their excitement forgot to stop at a village for the night. When it grew dark they found themselves in a thick forest. They were afraid of losing their way in the dark, and decided to stop where they were for the night. They collected some wood and lit a fire to frighten away the wild animals. They decided to take it in turn all night to keep watch and feed the fire.

‘The carpenter took the first turn. As he sat there he picked up a piece of wood, and to while away his time he began to carve a doll from it. By the time he had finished it, his watch was over and he woke up the weaver and then went to sleep.

‘The weaver wondered how he would keep awake for three hours without doing anything. At that moment his eyes fell upon the doll fashioned by the

The Dumb Queen

carpenter. "Here is something to do," he thought, "I shall weave a beautiful cloth for the doll." He opened his bag and brought out a small handloom and began to work. By the time he had finished it and dressed the doll with the cloth he had woven, his watch was over, and he woke up the goldsmith and then went to sleep.

'The goldsmith too wondered what he would do to keep awake. When he saw the pretty doll dressed in a beautiful sari he knew it was the work of his friends. "I too shall make ornaments for her and complete the work," he said. So he made some lovely ornaments for the doll, bracelets and anklets, a necklace and earrings. When he had finished, his watch was over and he woke up the brahmin and went to sleep himself.

'It was three hours before sunrise when the brahmin's watch began. He said his early morning prayers, and as he sat meditating his eyes fell on the doll, beautifully dressed and decorated. The brahmin thought, "All my friends have exercised their skill, now it is my turn to use my knowledge. I shall show that my knowledge is superior to theirs for I shall give life to the doll." The brahmin invoked the name of the Narbada the sacred river and then invoked the name of his preceptor, after which he sat in deep meditation for some time. He then took water in his hands and with a prayer to Gayatri, the great consort of the Sun, the giver of life, he sprinkled it on the doll. The wooden figure moved and the doll came to life.

'By then the Sun had risen, and with it the other

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three boys. In the light of the Sun the four friends saw that there was a fifth person among them and that it was a lovely woman, beautifully dressed and with gold ornaments on her body.

‘When they realized who the woman was, the four friends began to quarrel. The carpenter said she was his as it was his idea, and he had made her. The weaver said she was his as he had clothed her, and so made her look human. The goldsmith said she was his as she was wearing the rich ornaments he had made for her; and the brahmin claimed her to be his as he had given her the one important thing, life.

‘Now tell me, O, earring’ asked the king, ‘to whom did the woman belong?’

‘She belonged to the brahmin who gave her life,’ replied the earring.

‘Liar!’ cried the dumb queen and pulled out the earring and threw it away in anger. ‘How can you, who are my earring, give such an incorrect reply?’ she cried.

‘If I am wrong,’ retorted the earring, ‘why don’t you give a correct reply to the king? If you do know the correct answer and do not give it I shall bring evil to you.’

So the queen replied: ‘She belonged to the goldsmith. The person who made her was her father; he who gave her clothes her brother; he who gave her life her God; and he who gave her rich ornaments, by way of dowry, was her husband.’

The dumb queen had spoken and one screen had to be removed. The king again asked her to re-

The Dumb Queen

nounce her vow and speak to him. She replied through her maid-in-waiting that that was not possible. Then the king said he would tell another story, and her necklace would do the speaking for her if she would not. Vaital entered the necklace and replied, 'Well done, great king! The queen has no wisdom, otherwise she would fall at your feet and talk to you as you desire'.

The king began his story.

'There was a beautiful city called Rajvati and the king who ruled there was called Rajeshwar. The king was happy in everything except one thing, and that was, he had no children. It made him miserable to think that while God had given him everything, he had withheld this one great favour. He went to the banks of the holy river Ganges to pray and please the gods. He would bathe every morning in the river and then worship Lord Shiva, for several hours. He did this for six months, and at the end of that time, Lord Shiva was pleased and appeared to the king, who fell at his feet.

"Rise," said Lord Shiva, "I am pleased with your devotion. You will have a son. But you must always worship me. Do not forget." Saying this Lord Shiva disappeared.

'The king was very happy and went back to his kingdom. There he continued his worship of Lord Shiva every day. Within a year the queen gave birth to a son and there was rejoicing throughout the city. The king worshipped Lord Shiva and thanked him for this favour.

'When the son was old enough, the king put him

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on his throne and he left for a secluded life in the forest. Before leaving he told the young prince to worship Shiva every day. The prince promised, and the king left with a light heart.

‘Not far from Rajvati was another city called Shitalpur where ruled King Shambar. He had a beautiful daughter whom he married to the young king of Rajvati. When the time came for the princess to go to Rajvati the astrologers said that the princess should not be taken to her new home that day as the time was not auspicious. She should go a month later. So the young king returned home alone. When a month had passed he sent the royal priest to fetch the princess. The princess, however, refused to go with the priest and sent word that the king should come for her himself. He should come alone, without even a friend for company.

‘The king, however, did not wish to travel alone so he asked his friend, the son of his minister, to take the place of his charioteer, and thus they went to Shitalpur. Half-way there was a temple of Lord Shiva, and close by was a pond covered with lovely lotuses. The king asked his friend to stop the chariot and he bathed in the pool, plucked a few lotuses and went to the temple and offered them in worship to Lord Shiva. He took a vow that on his way back with the princess he would stop again, and offer more lotuses. He then proceeded on his journey and arrived at Shitalpur where he was given a great reception.

‘The king stayed there for six weeks and then accompanied by his queen left for Rajvati. When

The Dumb Queen

they came to the temple, he stopped to worship Lord Shiva. He bathed in the pool but there were no lotuses. He remembered his vow and did not know how to fulfil it. He entered the temple and prayed to the great Lord. Then a thought came to him. "The face" he thought, "is very often compared to a lotus. If I cannot offer a lotus, I can offer my head, and thus fulfil my vow." He drew his sword and cut off his head, which rolled down at the feet of Lord Shiva. ~~NAWAB FALG JUNG BAHADUR~~

'The queen and the minister's son waited and waited and wondered why the king did not return. They grew very anxious and the minister's son decided to go and find out what had happened. When he entered the temple he saw the king lying in a pool of blood. He was very frightened, and did not know how to tell the queen what he had found. "She will suspect me and think that I killed the king. The only thing for me to do is to die." He drew his sword and cut off his head.

'Minutes passed and yet neither the king nor the minister's son returned. The queen got frightened and wondered what could have happened to them. She decided to find out for herself. When she entered the temple she saw their bodies lying there at the feet of Lord Shiva. The queen was sad and frightened. "What shall I say to save myself? People will think that I killed them." She prayed to Shiva, "O Lord! I too do not wish to live. I shall kill myself. I die for no fault of mine. May the sin of my death be on your head." She was about to kill herself when Lord Shiva suddenly

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appeared as an ascetic and cried, "Stop!" and caught her by the arm. "You have still to live, why do you kill yourself? Your husband made a vow to offer me lotuses when he passed this way with you. As there were no lotuses he offered me his head. The minister's son was frightened that you would think he killed the king. He did not know what you would say, so he killed himself. But why should you?"

'To this the queen replied, "I shall not go back alone. I would prefer to die here. Life has no charm for me now."

'Lord Shiva then said, "I am pleased with you. Forget your sorrow and ask for a favour."

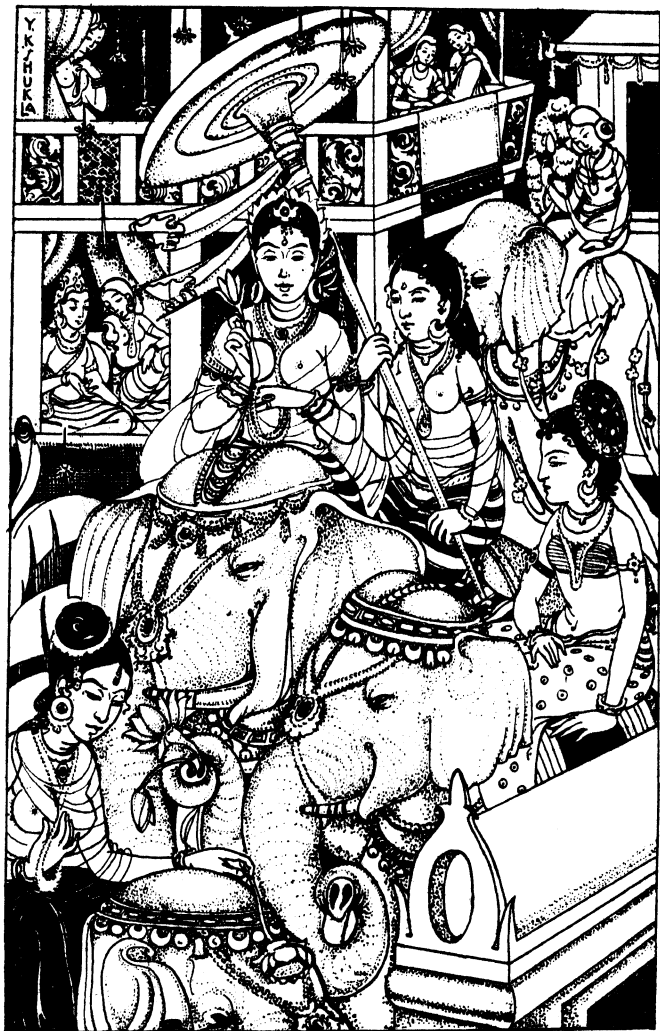
'The queen prayed to Lord Shiva and said, "Great Lord! For my sake bring these two back to life."

"It shall be done," replied Lord Shiva, "put the heads on their bodies, cover them up with this cloth and then sprinkle this water on them and they will live." Shiva then disappeared.

'The queen did as she was told. But in her hurry to bring them back to life she put the head of the king on the body of the minister's son and the head of the minister's son on the body of the king. When they got up the question arose as to who was her husband. The person with the king's head and the body of the minister's son, or the person with the king's body and the head of the minister's son.

'Reply, O dumb queen! to whom did the queen belong, to the head or to the body?'

The queen remained silent but the necklace replied, 'At the time of the marriage she held the



They were all amazed to see the royal procession

NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR



Round the well he saw young and beautiful women

The Dumb Queen

right hand of the man and, therefore, she belonged to the body and not to the head. The body is heavy. It weighs nearly twenty stone while the head weighs a few pounds. The woman, therefore, belonged to the larger part, the body and not the head.'

'Liar,' cried the dumb queen, purple with anger. She snatched off her necklace and threw it away.

'I have said,' replied the necklace angrily, 'what I think is right. If my reply is not correct why do you not give the correct answer to the king? If you know the true reply and will not, my curses be upon you.'

'O, King Vikram,' said the queen, 'the scriptures say that the wife belongs to the head. A man is known by his face. The head is the best part of the body. It is the jewel of the body. The wife, therefore, belongs to the head and not to the body.'

The king was pleased with the answer. The queen had spoken a second time and another screen was removed.

The king waited and said, 'O queen! I shall now tell you a third story, listen carefully. Speak to me so that I shall know you are listening'.

'For shame! my Lord!' replied an attendant 'how can the queen speak? If she could speak there would be no need for these screens.'

'Then I shall ask the queen's anklet to do so,' said the king.

Vaital entered the anklet and replied, 'O great king! This queen is fit to be your servant. She has no sense, otherwise she would fall at your feet and do what you ask her to. Never mind, I shall help you.'

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Then the king began his tale and the anklet showed that it was listening.

‘In the country of Saurashtra, there was a small city whose king was very religious and a devotee of the great goddess. He had no children so he worshipped the great goddess Mahakali who was pleased with his devotion, and gave him a daughter. She was very beautiful and whoever saw her fell in love with her. The king was very happy that he had been saved from the misfortune of childlessness, and that he now had so lovely a daughter.

‘When the princess came of age the king asked his chief minister, as well as his friends and relatives, to find a suitable husband for her.

‘The chief minister, during a tour through the king’s lands, came to a city where he found a prince who appeared to be a suitable match for the princess. So he arranged the betrothal and announced the tenth day of the coming month as the auspicious day for marriage. The prince was to come to the palace on that day.

‘Now the queen’s brother went on a visit to his estate, and on his way back he passed through the territory of a young prince whom he thought would make a good husband for his niece. The marriage was arranged and the prince promised to come to the princess on the tenth day of the coming month, which had been pronounced an auspicious day. The queen’s brother then returned with the good news.

‘The king too had gone out hunting, and he met a young prince who made a very favourable

The Dumb Queen

impression on him. The king decided to make him his son-in-law. Astrologers were consulted and they fixed the tenth day of the coming month as the most auspicious day for marriage. The king invited the young prince to present himself on that day, and then he returned to his city.

‘Thus without knowing that the marriage of the princess had been arranged with three different bridegrooms, the three princes arrived at the palace a day before the date fixed for the wedding. They were all very noble and handsome young men, and it was difficult to know which one to choose as the bridegroom. The king was very worried and did not know whom to send back.

‘On the wedding morning the princess was having her bridal bath. While she was bathing a cobra came out of the drain where it had lodged itself the previous night and bit her, and she died immediately.

‘When the news of her death was known in the city the people were overwhelmed with grief. The atmosphere of gaiety changed into one of deep gloom. The dead body of the princess was taken to the river bank for cremation. The three young men also joined the funeral procession. When the body was placed on the pyre and they saw the beauty of the princess, they were all struck with grief. The loss of this beautiful young girl became so great a sorrow to them that a feeling of disgust for the world and for worldly life came over them. All three decided immediately to give up their kingdoms and renounce the world. One of them decided to go to the holy

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Ganges with the ashes of the princess and throw them into the sacred waters. Another decided to go on a pilgrimage to holy places, vowing that whatever merit he gained from his worship at sacred shrines should go to the princess. The third one decided to collect the princess' bones and erect a shrine on the spot and worship the bones every day till he died. All those who had come with the bridegrooms for the wedding went back to their homes while the young men carried out their vows.

'The first one collected the ashes and went to Benares. The second one wandered from one holy place to another; and the third built a hut on the river bank where the princess had been cremated, and daily worshipped her bones, which he preserved with great care in a silver casket.

'The second young man who wandered from place to place, found himself one day in a city in the south. It was midday when he reached the town. He was very hungry, so he knocked at the door of a house nearby and asked for food. The door was opened by a woman and, seeing an ascetic, she welcomed him and asked him to rest while she prepared his food. She then sent her husband to buy some ghee. The ascetic washed himself and then sat on the doorstep waiting for his food. From where he sat he could see the woman cooking it. As she was busy cooking her child came to her crying. She tried to pacify the child with soft words, but the child could not be persuaded to stop crying. She finally became very angry with the child, especially as she was anxious to feed the hungry man. She became so

The Dumb Queen

annoyed that she picked up the child and threw it into the oven where it was soon reduced to ashes.

‘The ascetic was amazed at what he had just seen. He could not believe that a mother could be so cruel. A feeling of nausea came over him, and he felt he could not eat from the hands of a murderess. He got up, and without a word, left the house. He had only gone a few steps when he met the husband returning from his shopping. The husband was surprised to see the ascetic going away without having had his food. “Please come back,” he called, “if we allow a guest to go hungry it will be a sin for we shall be breaking a vow.”

‘The ascetic told him that his wife had killed their child, and therefore he could not eat in their home. The husband laughed on hearing this and said, “Noble Sir, do not be frightened. We know a secret by which we can bring the child back to life.”

‘When he heard this the ascetic returned with the man. The man collected the bones of the child, chanted some words and sprinkled water on them, and the child came to life. The ascetic was amazed. He fell at the feet of the man and said, “Teach me that secret, and then only will I eat and drink in your home”.

‘The man agreed and taught him the secret, and blessed him, saying “You will be able to bring back one human being to life”.

‘The ascetic was overcome with joy. He ate his food and soon left, to hurry back to the place where the princess had been cremated. He arrived there on the same day as she had died a year before.

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‘The prince who had gone to Benares also arrived back on the same day and the two young men went into the hut where the third prince lived. The royal ascetic then asked for the bones of the princess, then he chanted the secret words over them and sprinkled water on them. The moment he did so, the princess came back to life.

‘Now that the princess was alive, the three men began to quarrel as to who should marry her. The prince who had gone to Benares said that it was the powers of the sacred river Ganges, where he had bathed in the name of the princess, that had brought about this miracle. The second prince claimed her saying that it was because of the secret he had learned during his wanderings that she had been restored to life. The third one said that he had preserved the bones and worshipped them every day; but for him, the secret would have been worthless as there would have been no bones. The princess, therefore, belonged to him.

‘Tell me, O anklet,’ asked the king, ‘who should marry her?’

‘The one who learnt the secret of restoring life,’ replied the anklet promptly, ‘can claim her.’

‘Liar!’ cried the queen, purple with rage, as she broke the anklet in seven pieces and threw them away.

‘I have replied according to my judgement,’ replied the anklet testily. ‘If I am wrong, why don’t you give the correct answer? If you know the answer and do not give it, may misfortune follow you.’

The Dumb Queen

With some reluctance the queen then replied, 'He who threw the ashes in the river is the son, he who restored her life is the father; but he who preserved her bones and worshipped them night and day is the one who is entitled to be her husband.'

'Remove a screen,' said the king, 'the queen has spoken.'

So the third screen was removed and now there was only one left. The king began his fourth tale. 'Who will reply to my question this time?' asked the king.

Vaital entered the queen's bracelet and answered, 'My lord! The queen does not really know you. One who has earned merit for good deeds alone deserves to see you. There can be no merit in what the queen has done so far, since she is not worthy to see you.'

'Never mind what the queen has done or not done. Listen to my story,' said the king.

'In the country of Maru there is a place called Moreshwar. The name of the king who ruled there was Sunderpal. There was a blindman living in that town. He had been an orphan since his childhood and so was looked after by his uncle. In the house next to his lived a cripple who could not use his legs. He too was an orphan and lived with his elder brother. The blindman was tired of living with his uncle who treated him unkindly; and the cripple could no longer listen to the daily grumblings of his sister-in-law. One day the two men met and talked to each other about the sad life they were leading.

"If I had eyes," said the blind man, "I would

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leave this place, go abroad and earn my living.”

“Of course,” agreed the cripple, “if I could walk I too would do the same.”

‘Suddenly the blindman exclaimed, “Why can’t you be my eyes and I be your legs? I can carry you on my shoulders and you can direct me. Thus we can go abroad and might be able to earn a living.”

‘The cripple thought it a very good suggestion. So one day they both left the town. The cripple rode on the shoulders of the blindman and directed him along the road. Stopping only at night at small villages they went on till they reached a city.

‘The ruler of that city had a beautiful daughter. The only defect she had was an ugly tumour on her body and nobody wished to marry her. “The only way to find a bridegroom for her,” thought the king one day, “is to order an elephant to be led round the city, carrying a pot of water in its trunk; on whomsoever the elephant pours the water I shall marry that man to my daughter.”

‘The next day the elephant was taken through the city carrying a pot of water in her trunk. It was the day on which the blindman and the cripple entered the city. They were standing in the crowd, the cripple on the shoulders of the blindman watching the procession when the elephant came slowly up the road towards them. Seeing the two men she stopped and poured the water over them.

‘The king had to keep his word and he married the princess to both the men. He gave them much wealth and arranged for them to live in a special house.

The Dumb Queen

‘The poor blindman could not see at all, so the cripple tried to win the princess for himself. He planned to kill the blindman, so that he would own the princess and her wealth himself. He persuaded the princess to join him in his plot to get rid of the unfortunate man.

‘One day he asked the princess to cook a very poisonous snake and to give it to the blindman so that he would die. The princess did as she was asked. She cut the poisonous snake into small pieces and putting them in a vessel with water, she put the vessel on the fire to boil.

‘The blindman was hungry but no one seemed to bring him his food. He waited for a long time and then called to the princess to bring him some food. There was no answer. Again he waited, but no food was brought to him. He groped his way to the kitchen to find something to eat. He found there was something boiling on the oven and thinking it was his food he opened the lid of the vessel. No sooner had he removed the lid than the room was filled with a thick, poisonous vapour. The fumes were so powerful that they cleared the film that had covered his eyes and cured him of his blindness. The blindman could see! He looked into the pot and found that it contained pieces of snake, and knew at once that the cripple and the princess had intended to kill him. He was so angry that he rushed out where the two sat side by side, and taking the cripple by his feet he swung him in the air—once, twice and again and again and then dashed him against the princess. A miracle happened! The tumour on the

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princess' body burst open, and while swinging the cripple he had so stretched his legs that the stiffness had gone and he could now walk. Such was their fate—all three were cured of their defects.

'The blindman and the cripple no longer depended on each other and they soon began to quarrel about whom the princess belonged to. "Tell me, O bracelet, who could really claim her as his wife?" asked the king.'

'I think the blindman who went round the fire four times with her,' replied the bracelet.

'Liar!' cried the queen. 'I am ashamed of you. How can you say such a thing!' She tore off the bracelet and threw it away.

'I have said what I think is true,' replied the bracelet. 'If you know the correct answer then speak, or may misfortune follow you.'

'The blindman only served the cripple as a horse,' said the princess. 'The cripple was the rider. The girl cannot belong to a horse, she was married to the rider. So the cripple can claim her.'

'You are right,' exclaimed the king joyfully. 'You have spoken a fourth time and broken your vow and I have won, now remove the last screen.'

The screen was removed and the queen came forward and sat by Vikram and said, 'You have won and I have lost. Now I am yours to command. You can do what you like with me. Have mercy on me. Take me with you and marry me.'

'I cannot marry you,' replied the king, 'I have promised you in marriage to a brahmin youth. So I shall take you to him.'

The Dumb Queen

The queen prepared to leave her home. She placed her younger sister on the throne behind the four screens, and the girl took the vow of never speaking. Everyone who had been thrown into prison by the queen was released. They blessed King Vikram and returned joyfully to their homes. King Vikram then returned to Ujjaini in a golden chariot accompanied by the queen. When they arrived at Ujjaini she was married to the brahmin youth.

‘Such was the great King Vikram, so magnanimous and so brave,’ said Chitrangana. ‘Only if you are like him may you mount the throne, or else you will be unhappy.’ The statuette became inanimate and the king having missed the auspicious moment had to wait for another day.

The Barber's Tale

NCE again King Bhoja made preparations to mount the throne. As he raised his foot a voice cried, 'Stop! Stop!'

The king hastily withdrew his foot and asked, 'Who is it who stops me?'

'My name is Shyama,' replied another statuette. 'This throne belonged to the great and magnanimous King Vikram. He alone who is like him can ascend this throne. If any one else dares to do it, misery will come to him, therefore I warn you.'

'You too praise Vikram? Tell me what he did to deserve it,' said the king.

'Listen, O king!' replied Shyama. There was a beautiful city called Ujjaini where the great King Vikram ruled. One day a holy man named Maneknath came to his court. He was alone, without any disciples. The king, however, received him with due honour and with generous hospitality; and the man lived in the palace for seven days. The night before he left he was having a quiet talk with the king. They were alone except for the barber who massaged the feet of the king and the holy man in turn.

'Tomorrow, O king!' said Maneknath, 'I shall leave here before dawn. You have treated me well.

The Barber's Tale

I am very pleased with what you have done for me. Therefore, ask for whatever boon you may desire.'

The king with folded hands replied, 'You are a holy man and therefore an incarnation of God to me. I am already blessed with your favours. I want nothing, so what can I ask for?'

But Maneknath was insistent. He wished to repay the king for his kindness. 'I shall give you something you do not possess,' he said, 'so please send the barber away.'

When the barber had left them Maneknath taught the king the secret of entering a body that was dead and making it live. 'Someday when I come back, I shall teach you more,' he said. They talked through the night and before dawn the holy man left the palace.

The barber was curious to know what wonderful thing it was that the king did not possess which Maneknath had so secretly given to him.

'I shall not feel at ease till I know what he received and am able to get the same thing myself,' he thought. Night and day the thought obsessed him. He could not sleep, and became very unhappy. One night he was unable to sleep and felt so miserable that he began to cry aloud.

The king was in the queen's quarters and heard the weeping. He went out to see who it was among the servants of the Royal household who was so unhappy. He went in the direction from which the sound of weeping came, and reached the quarters where the barber and his wife were living. He heard the wife scolding her husband. 'What is the reason

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for this howling ? Why don't you tell me. Everyone will stare at this house. They will wonder what has happened. They might think I am beating you ! Can't you speak ?'

'If you must know the reason I shall tell you,' replied the barber between sobs. 'A holy man came to the king's court. He gave the king something before he left. I want to know what it is. The king has everything. Why should he have anything more? I also served the holy man, why should I not get what the king has been given? Unless I know what he gave the king and unless I have it too, I shall die and my death will be on the king's head.' The barber began to sob more loudly.

The wife tried to soothe him and at last managed to make him go to sleep. The king went back to the palace.

The next morning the king sent for the barber. The barber's wife was frightened when she saw the royal messenger. She thought the king had found out what the barber had said during the night and would punish him. She tried to persuade her husband not to go, but to say he was ill. But the barber said, 'What can he do to me even if he has heard?' and went.

When he reached the royal presence, the king told him that he knew of his unhappiness. 'If you think', said the king, 'that the holy man has given me wealth it is not so. He has taught me a secret which is of no use to you. If wealth is what you desire then ask for it, and I shall give it to you if that will make you happy.'

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To this the barber replied with folded hands, 'What shall I do with wealth? Where shall I keep it? I wish to know the secret the holy man has taught your majesty, that alone will lessen my sorrow.'

'Are you mad?' exclaimed the king. 'It will not be of any use to you.'

'Your Majesty!' replied the barber, 'I shall die if I cannot have it.'

When the king saw that the barber would not have anything but the secret, he took him into another room and taught him the secret and ordered him not to tell it to a soul. The barber was very happy and went home with his mind at peace.

One day the king went out hunting with a large retinue. In the forest the hunters sighted seven antelopes, and the chase began. There was one antelope without a tail, and the king marked it for his own and galloped after it. The king chased the antelope over hills and into valleys and at last the antelope grew tired and slackened its pace, and the king killed it with an arrow. He looked around and saw that he had left the others far behind. He thought he was alone and was tempted to test the secret the holy man had taught him. 'Let me see if I can enter the body of this antelope,' he said. He chanted the secret words and left his own body and entered the antelope's which immediately came to life, and his own body lay dead.

At that very moment the barber who had joined the hunt, and was not far behind the king, came upon the scene. He saw the body of the king lying there and the antelope standing by. He knew at once

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that the king had entered the antelope's body. A wicked thought crossed his mind, 'Why should I not enter the king's body?' The barber did not wait to think twice but chanted the secret words and entered the king's body. He then raised his sword to kill the deer.

The king realized that the barber wished to kill him so he ran as fast as he could and soon escaped. The king's followers could now be heard close by and the barber thought it wise to return to them. The followers were not aware of the change that had taken place. They returned to the city and the people came out to welcome their king.

The barber now planned to have a very pleasant life. He was anxious to meet the queen who was the most beautiful of all the queens. He sent a message to her saying he would eat with her that evening. The queen was pleased and ordered a special meal, and sent her chief lady-in-waiting to receive the king outside her apartments, while she watched the arrival through her latticed window. The barber had never seen the queen before, so when the lady-in-waiting, with folded hands went forward to receive him, he thought she was the queen. He took her by the hand and praised her beauty. The lady-in-waiting was frightened at this strange and indecorous behaviour from the king.

The queen who was watching heard his words, and became suspicious. She decided to test him as she believed he was an impostor.

The barber entered the room and sat on the cushioned seat. He asked the queen to sit by his



The king chased the antelope over hills and into valleys



The child was healthy and strong. He was so handsome that many people came to see him

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side, but she stood at a distance and refused to oblige him unless he finished the story he had begun the previous night and had left incomplete. 'I also wish to know,' asked the queen, 'what we ate last night.'

The barber could not answer and tried to evade the question. He said he had forgotten about the story, and as for food, was it so important?

The queen was angry. She knew that the person before her was not the king. She thought of a plan quickly, and invited the barber to go with her to another room as she wished to talk to him alone. As the barber entered the room she closed the door behind him and locked it from outside. She decided to consult the chief minister the next morning to find out what should be done.

The next day the chief minister was summoned to the queen's presence and she told him of her suspicions and asked for advice. 'It is true that this man has the body and the form of the king, but I feel quite sure that he is not the king. Let us, therefore, test him,' she said.

She took the minister outside the room where the barber was locked in, and told the barber she would let him out if he replied to the riddles she asked. 'What is it', the queen asked, 'that is born with horns, sheds them in youth; and grows them again in old age?'

The answer is 'the moon' but the barber could not reply.

'What is it' asked the queen again, 'which has hands, feet, a head, a nose, and a body and accompa-

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nies you on the road but neither eats nor drinks?’

The answer is ‘one’s shadow’ but the barber did not know the answer. The queen asked many more riddles but she could not get a satisfactory reply to a single one. Vikram was known for his cleverness, and the barber’s failure to answer these simple riddles strengthened the queen and the minister in their belief that this was an impostor, or if he was the king, there was something very wrong with him. The queen decided to keep him locked up till a more satisfactory solution was found to this mystery.

Now the king, with the deer’s body, escaped into the forest. He still thought like a man but could not speak. He wandered about in the forest not knowing what to do. Thus a fortnight passed. One day, while resting under a tree, he saw a parrot and its mate sitting on the branch of the tree. Suddenly a hawk swooped down and carried away the mate. The other parrot was so frightened that it fell from the branch and died.

‘A parrot’s body is better than the body of a deer,’ thought the king, ‘for I shall be able to fly and talk.’ He repeated the magic words, left the body of the deer and entered the parrot’s. The parrot’s body came to life immediately and the king flew towards Ujjaini. When he arrived in the city he found the people very sad for they had been told that the king was not well. The parrot flew to the chief minister’s house and waited for the minister to be alone. Then the king told him what had happened; how the holy man had taught him the secret of entering a dead body; how he had taught it

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to the barber and what had happened in the forest. The minister took the parrot with him to the queen and asked it to repeat the story. When it had finished the parrot added, 'If you do not believe me ask me any question and I shall reply to it. That should convince you of the truth of my claim.'

The queen accepted the parrot's word and embraced it, and told it what she had done to the barber.

'I knew at once that he was not the king,' she said.

Then the king asked for a dead body to be taken to the barber. He must be told that if he was really the king he should be able to enter the dead body and make it alive. 'Persuade him to do it in such a manner that he will not become suspicious. As soon as he leaves my body I shall enter it. Do not let any one know about this for if the barber gets an inkling of it, he will not leave my body,' said King Vikram.

A cobra was made to bite a ram which died in a few minutes. Its body was taken to the queen's apartment. The queen went to the room where the barber was locked in and said, 'If you convince me that you are the king, I shall let you out and do whatever you ask me to'.

'Why do you disbelieve me, good and beautiful queen?' cried the barber. 'I tell you again I am the king.'

To this the queen replied, 'If you can enter a dead body and make it live, I shall know that you are really the king'.

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The barber was very pleased to hear this. This was something he could do. He replied readily, 'Is that all? I shall certainly do it'.

So he was brought out and taken to the room where the dead body of the ram lay. The chief minister and the parrot were also present. The barber chanted the secret words and left the king's body to enter the body of the ram. As the animal began to move the king at once left the parrot's body and entered his own and stood up. The king regained his own body and the barber had to be satisfied with the body of an animal. The king ordered the ram to be kept in one of the outhouses and to be well looked after. It was treated with kindness and given good things to eat.

Now in a village close by lived a brahmin, his wife and his son. The brahmin was anxious to find a wife for his son but he had no money. He decided to go to Ujjaini to the court of King Vikram and ask him for help. He and his family set out for Ujjaini the very next day. In the forest, close to the city, they lost their way and had to spend the night there. While they were looking for a safe place a leopard came out of a bush and attacked the brahmin's son. The old couple shouted and screamed and managed to frighten the leopard and it ran away. But the son had been struck by the leopard's paw and in a few minutes he died. The bereaved parents were beside themselves with grief. In the morning they carried the dead body between them to the banks of the Kshipra river. They were crying aloud as they carried him. The people who passed

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them on the road wondered what had happened. The brahmin asked a passerby the name of the city they had arrived in and where the burial place was.

‘This is Ujjaini’ replied the man, ‘where the great and magnanimous King Vikram rules. No one is unhappy here. What has happened to you? Who are you? Why are you crying so bitterly?’

The brahmin told his tale and said, ‘I shall go to the court of King Vikram and see if he can bring my child back to life. If he can do so then we shall be happy, otherwise we too will burn ourselves on my child’s funeral pyre.’

He asked his wife to stay with the boy’s body and he set out for the king’s court. The king received him kindly and asked him why he had asked to see him. The brahmin told him everything and added, ‘If you cannot bring my child back to life, both myself and my wife have decided to burn ourselves in his funeral fire.’

The king was very sad when he heard this. He asked him to wait for a day. When the brahmin left he became thoughtful. ‘How can I bring the dead back to life? It is expecting too much of me. I shall go to the temple of the Goddess tonight and see if I can get any help.’

That night the king went to the temple and prayed for guidance. ‘O Great Goddess! I cannot bear to see the misery of this brahmin. If I cannot remove his sorrow, it will mean that I have failed in the fulfilment of my vow and I shall have to kill myself. I pray You, help me.’

The goddess, always ready to help her devotees,

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reminded the king of the barber who had become a ram. 'If you can make the barber enter the body of the brahmin boy, you will have brought him to life and the parents will be happy', said the goddess.

The king was very happy and thanked the goddess. In the early morning he went to the ram and said, 'If you enter the body of the brahmin boy, I shall marry you to my daughter and give you much wealth besides. If, however, you refuse to accede to my request I shall destroy you with my sword.' He then ordered the ram to be taken to the banks of the Kshipra where the brahmin couple were waiting.

'If I do not obey the king,' thought the barber, 'he will kill me. On the other hand if I do what he asks me to, I have the chance to marry a princess and live in luxury for the rest of my life.'

The barber quickly left the ram's body and entered the body of the brahmin boy. The parents were overcome with joy when they saw their son alive. All those assembled there were amazed to see this miracle happen. The king kept his promise to the barber and gave his daughter in marriage to the brahmin boy.

'So great and large hearted was King Vikram. King Bhoja! If you are like him, then you can sit on this throne. Otherwise, you will be unhappy,' and Shyama ceased to speak.

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NCE again King Bhoja prepared to mount the throne. As he raised his foot there came the voice again, 'Stop! Stop! Do not dare to sit on this throne.' The king hastily withdrew his foot and asked impatiently, 'Who is it now who stops me?'

'My name is Simhika,' replied another statuette. 'This throne belonged to the mighty and magnanimous king, Vikram. He who is like him alone can sit on the throne. Any other who dares to do so will bring sorrow to his house.'

'Tell me what Vikram did to deserve such praise,' said the king.

'Listen, O king,' answered Simhika. King Vikram lived in Ujjaini, the capital of Malwa. Under his benign rule the people were happy and prosperous. Once a few pilgrims came to his court. Wherever they had travelled they had heard stories of the king's kindness so that when they reached Ujjaini they were anxious to see the great man with their own eyes. On making inquiries they were directed to the place where the king held his daily court. The king welcomed the holy men and asked them the reason for their visit.

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‘Your Majesty!’ replied the men, ‘we have not come to make any request. Nor are we unhappy. We wander from place to place and enjoy seeing new places and new sights. We have come to Ujjaini in the course of our wanderings. After seeing what is worth seeing in your beautiful city we shall proceed on our journey. We have heard of you wherever we have travelled and we wished to see you and hear you speak before we left.’

The king was pleased with their tribute. He gave them food and money for their journey, and when they left he thought, ‘What a happy life this must be! To wander without any care, any anxiety! I feel too I should like to wear the dress of a holy man and set out on a long pilgrimage. Why should I not do so? It is a long time since I left my kingdom. I shall wander like the holy men and find out what is happening throughout the world.’ He thought about this for many days and after consulting the chief minister, to whom he entrusted his kingdom, he set out on foot dressed as a pilgrim.

He visited many holy places and bathed in the sacred waters of rivers. One day he found himself in a city in the Kannadadesh. He reached the main bazar where there was a small bania shop in a side street. The king put down his bundle, washed his face and sat in the shop to rest.

The shopkeeper was a poor man and his business was very small. But from the moment the king entered the shop, customers began to come in. The bania now had as much custom in one hour as he had ever had in a whole month. The bania realized

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that here indeed was a holy man whose mere presence had brought him so much luck. So when the king got up to leave, he addressed him with folded hands: 'Holy Sir! Please stay one night with me and sanctify my poor home.'

To this the king replied, 'Today is the first day of the Navaratra festival of the great goddess. Wherever I stay today I shall have to stay there for ten days'.

The bania was very pleased to hear this. It was great fortune for him. He expressed his pleasure and led the king behind his shop where he lived. He then told his daughter-in-law that here was a saintly, almost a divine man, who had brought luck to him, and enjoined her to look after him well, and see that he was not troubled in any way. When he returned home in the evening after closing his shop, he brought the good news that his business had been very good that day. The next day it was better, the day after that still better and the bania was now earning a good deal of money.

The bania had a pretty daughter who was of marriageable age. He had been worried about her as his poverty had prevented him from finding a suitable husband for her. Now that he had begun to make money he decided to look for a husband for the girl. The daughter, however, could not think of anyone she wished to marry. Her sister-in-law tried to help her selection by recommending several young men who were eligible. But the girl refused each one of them. The sister-in-law became angry and at last she said rudely, 'You think you are

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a princess and no poor bania boy would do for you. King Vikram only would be good enough. Why not marry him and be a queen!’

This taunt made the girl very angry and she replied in her anger, ‘Yes, I shall marry King Vikram, and no one else. All other men are like my father and brothers.’

The king was in the next room and heard everything and felt amused. He heard the girl taking a vow to marry him and thought, ‘I have a day or two more to stay here, let me see how the girl fulfils her vow’.

That night the king was lying awake in his bed outside the house. It was about midnight and he saw the girl coming out. The king was curious to know where she was going and he followed her. She reached a well close to the house and was about to jump in when Vikram rushed from behind and stopped her.

‘What troubles you?’ asked the king. ‘Your sorrow must be great if it makes you do this, for you are too young to die.’

The girl was surprised to see the holy man. ‘Where have you come from at this time of the night?’ she exclaimed. ‘I shall tell you the reason why I am doing this, then you must go back. My father is anxious to find me a husband, but I do not want any of the young men my sister-in-law recommends to me. My sister-in-law became angry today and taunted me that King Vikram was the only man good enough for me. She made me angry too, and I took a vow to marry no one but King

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Vikram. I am a poor woman, daughter of a poor bania. What chance have I to marry the great Vikram! The only way out for me is to die. So please do not stop me. I have heard the name of King Vikram, but where he rules or where he lives I do not know. But wherever he is my death will be on his head.'

To this the king objected. 'You die because of your own folly,' he replied, 'why do you blame King Vikram for this? You had better give up this mad idea of suicide and go home with me. I shall show you a way by which you can marry Vikram.'

But the girl would not hear of it and was on the point of jumping into the well when the king cried, 'Stop!' and held her by the hand.

At this the girl became very angry. 'Fie on you! How dare you hold my hand. You have broken my vow of a virgin. I cannot live now. I must die.'

'Look at me. I am Vikram,' said the king. 'I left Ujjaini on a pilgrimage sometime ago and I have nearly come to the end of my travels. I shall now go back to Ujjaini and on reaching the place I shall send for you and then marry you.'

On hearing these words the girl was overcome with joy. Her vow would be fulfilled and there would be no need for her to die. However, she did not have the patience to wait till the king reached Ujjaini and sent for her. She begged him to marry her according to the gandharva form of marriage, and at last the king agreed. He made one condition that no one should know about the marriage till he returned to Ujjaini and sent for

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her. The girl agreed and so they were married.

Two days later the king left the bania's home. He secretly met the girl before leaving and gave her a thousand gold mohurs and some precious stones and a note, and asked her to preserve the note very carefully. ~~MAWAB SALAR JUNG BANADUN~~

In due course the king reached his capital and was accorded a great reception by his people. After his long absence from the State there were many things to attend to and the king had no time to think of personal matters, and he put off sending for the bania girl. Days passed and he forgot all about her.

The girl waited anxiously for the message from the king. As days passed her anxiety grew and grew and she became the more anxious when she found that she was soon going to be a mother. Her sister-in-law soon found out and told many of her friends. When the girl's father heard it he was angry and ashamed. He drove her from the house. 'You have brought shame on my grey hairs,' he shouted; 'leave my house and never show me your face again.'

The sister-in-law mocked her, crying after her as she left. 'So you were going to marry King Vikram! Where is he now? Perhaps you are going to him!' The poor girl did not reply as she had promised Vikram not to disclose their secret till he sent for her. She left her father's house without a word, and took refuge for a few days in a temple to Shiva outside the town. Vikram had given her enough money, so she bought a small house, engaged a servant and began to live a simple life waiting for the message from Vikram. The people soon got tired of talking about

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her and abusing her; and they left her alone.

In course of time she gave birth to a son. He was healthy and strong. Many people came to see him. He had the high forehead, and strong young body which were signs of a royal birth, and everyone said that here indeed had a precious gift been given to a poor woman.

The child grew into a fine boy. At the age of seven he was sent to school. He was so clever that there was no need for him to learn a lesson twice. He was the cleverest boy in the whole school. There were many boys who became envious of him and teased him unkindly. They dared not say much to him, but they talked and whispered, asking each other who his father was and why he did not live with his son. One day the child struck another boy for some insulting remark and the boy in his anger cried out, 'Who are you to hit me. You, who have no father'.

This worried the child a good deal, and that afternoon he returned home and began to ask his mother questions. 'Tell me,' he pleaded, 'who my father is or I shall kill myself with this knife. You are not a widow and you are young. In the name of the God Shiva tell me the truth. To have a mother like you is a great honour, a great fortune, and yet if you do not tell the truth, I shall kill you and then kill myself. Please tell me my father's name.'

'I must tell him,' thought the woman, so she brought out the letter Vikram had given her and said, 'I do not know who your father is, but read this; he gave it to me before he left me.'

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The child eagerly took the letter, broke open the seal and began to read. The strange thing was that the letter was addressed to him. 'I, Vikram, the renowned king of Ujjaini', he read, 'am your father. Your mother is innocent. No blame should be attached to her for what she has done. I left her soon after marriage. She was brave enough not to protest. I have given her enough money to live on. May you both enjoy it. If you are my son, then come to Ujjaini and let me see you, but do not tell anyone where you are going. If you are my son then you too will be clever in everything, specially music. You will have to convince me that you are my son by showing me how clever you are.'

The child leapt with joy. He fell at his mother's feet and exclaimed, 'You are indeed blessed. You must have done great deeds in your past life to deserve to marry such a king. Give me a horse,' he added, 'I shall set out for Ujjaini immediately. Please permit me to go. I shall rouse my father from his forgetfulness, and make him send for you. I shall remove the stain on your name. I am not your son if I do not. Do not be anxious about me. I shall not allow anyone to deceive me. Be sure of that.' The child was very excited and begged and pleaded, and at last persuaded his mother to allow him to go to Ujjaini.

As soon as he had finished his preparations for the journey he set out on the road to Ujjaini. On the way he met with good omens and after a month and some days reached his destination. As he neared the city he saw crowds of people waiting outside a

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pleasure garden where the king had come to spend the day. The royal procession was returning to the city, and the boy saw his great father for the first time, and was overcome with happiness. He decided to stay outside the city in that very garden. When the king had gone followed by the people, he led his horse to a water trough in the garden. While the horse was drinking, the boy walked about and saw a woman with a basket of flowers sitting nearby. He went to her and said, 'Sister, I am a stranger here and have come from a distant country. I have brought this gift for my sister, please take it.' He then gave her a purse containing fifty gold pieces.

The woman was overcome with joy at the sight of so much gold, and welcomed him to the city. She offered him all the flowers in her basket saying, 'May you be greater even than Vikram'. She then took him to her home, prepared a bed for him and cooked a delicious meal for him. When he had eaten, he laid himself down on his bed to sleep.

The woman came to see that he was comfortable and then asked him who he was, what royal family he belonged to, and what great misfortune had made him leave his home so early. 'Remain here as long as you like and make yourself at home. You are my brother and I am your sister, so ask for anything you desire.'

To this the prince replied, 'Sister, my business is with the king. I have come to find my father. After a month I shall tell you who I am, and then I shall be able to give you more gifts. If you can keep me here till then, I shall be grateful. But I must warn

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you beforehand that I am on a secret mission and must live here quietly like a thief. If your king Vikram finds out that you have given me shelter, he will be very angry with you. Therefore, tell me whether you still wish to keep me after knowing this. I shall not be offended if you say you cannot.'

The woman assured him of her genuine desire that he should stay. 'I am blessed that a guest like you has come to my house. If the king is angry with me for harbouring you, I am prepared to give him my head. To me you are a God. Myself, my husband and my son will all be at your service. Live here with your mind at ease. Whatever you ask me to do, I shall do it. Eat, drink and be happy. I wish for no payment. I earn enough money from the flowers I sell at the king's court. I shall also be able to bring you the court news every day.'

The prince agreed to make the gardener's house his home, and thanking them again he retired for the night.

Very early the next morning, the woman gathered the lovely flowers from the garden and prepared to go to the king's court. The boy gave her a letter with instructions that it be delivered to the king. The woman took it and concealed it among the flowers specially selected for the king.

The king was holding his court when a letter was handed to him by an attendant who had found it among the flowers. The king opened it and read it aloud thinking it was some petition.

'To King Vikram of pure mind, I belong to

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your nobility and, therefore, own land in your kingdom. I have come to Ujjaini to claim it, and claim the money due to me for the last twelve years on this account. If you do not give it to me today, I shall take double the amount tomorrow. I shall take it from the king and from the people. If you do not hand over my property to me then I shall become an outlaw. Wake up, you usurper of my rights; I warn you I shall bring shame to you.'

On reading this the king became red with anger. The court at first thought it was a joke, but when they saw that the king was truly angry, they sat still waiting to hear what he would say.

'Who has written this?' cried the king trying to control himself. 'Whence this demand for land now? What was he doing all these years? Whoever has written this is a true son of his mother, but unless he keeps his word he is a liar. It is easy to write but difficult to carry out such threats. I shall have him seized tonight before he can do any mischief.'

The king then ordered a pan betel leaf to be taken round the court with the words, 'Whoever undertakes to bring this man before me by tomorrow should alone take the pan'.

There were many men in the court who were courageous and not afraid to die. But how could they undertake to catch the culprit without knowing who he was, and many hesitated. There were two brahmins however, Sahadeva and Muladeva who were the court jesters. They seized the pan, divided it between them and ate it. The king was pleased

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and treated them with honour, and promised them further honours when they had fulfilled their mission.

The king then ordered the citizens, by a beat of drums, to remain inside their homes that night. Whoever disobeyed the order was to be arrested as a thief.

The two jesters went home to make plans to catch the outlaw. They requested the king to have all the gates of the city closed except two gates leading to a lane. Near these two gates a trap was to be arranged.

‘If the writer of the letter is really a brave man he will surely enter the city through these gates,’ thought they, ‘and then he will be easily trapped.’ Sahadeva decided to keep watch at the gate on the right and Muladeva at the gate on the left.

The flower woman came home in the evening and told the boy all the court gossip. ‘Some thief’, she said, ‘has come to the city and preparations are being made to catch him.’ She then told him about the preparations that were being made, and about Sahadeva and Muladeva who had undertaken to catch the thief that night.

The prince heard the story with apparent indifference and after dinner they all went to bed. At midnight he got up and quietly dressed as a woman. He put collyrium in his eyes, a red dot on his forehead; put on bracelets and anklets that tinkled; and with a tray laden with materials for worship he quietly left the house.

Tinkle-tinkle, tinkle-tinkle—Sahadeva was surprised to hear the sound, and saw a woman coming towards

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him. At the sight of the woman he became excited and nervous. As she came nearer he told her, 'His Majesty's orders are that no one should leave home tonight, and yet where are you going by yourself? Don't you know the orders and the penalty for breaking them?'

The woman replied shyly, 'I have taken a vow to go to the temple of Lord Shiva every night, and therefore, in spite of the royal orders I have to leave home. I am the wife of the minister and am alone because I did not want any of my servants to disobey the royal command.' Saying this she went on.

After half an hour she returned the same way. The jester was eagerly awaiting her return and approached her half way. 'I have been waiting for you,' he said. 'If you have something to eat which you offered to Lord Shiva, may I have some of it?' He tried to make friends with her.

Then the woman asked him 'What are you doing here? Are you not disobeying the king's orders?'

The jester replied, 'There is an outlaw in this city. I have undertaken to capture him. I am waiting for him to come this way.'

'What will you do if he comes this way?' asked the woman in all innocence.

'I shall trap him with this chain,' replied the jester proudly. **NAWAB SALAR JUNG FARADUR**

'Show me how it can be done?' said the woman sweetly, 'and then I shall give you these sweets.' The charm of the woman and her coquettish ways had turned the jester's heart into pulp. He was very eager to please her.

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While they were talking Muladeva came up to them. Sahadeva asked him to help him show the woman how the trap worked. Sahadeva put one foot into the trap and asked Muladeva to put his in on the other side. Muladeva was also anxious to please the woman and so obliged by putting his foot in the trap. Then they showed the woman how to close it. As soon as they had put their feet in, the woman closed the trap and locked it carefully. The two men thought it was a joke and allowed the woman to play with the trap. But when the two were properly secured, and the woman started laughing, they realized their mistake. She then seized their arms and tied them behind their backs.

‘This seems to be a joke to you, but we shall suffer. Please release us at once,’ they cried.

‘Who is going to release you? I am not. I am the outlaw you are out to capture. And I am not a woman either.’ The prince blackened their faces, put lime on their heads and after beating them, he left. He reached the gardener’s cottage before day-break and quietly went to sleep.

In the morning when the gate-keeper arrived on duty, he saw two men with black faces; and did not wait to ask questions but hurried to the king to give him what he thought was good news. ‘My lord! the jesters have captured two thieves. I saw them with my own eyes.’

The king was overjoyed to hear that the thieves had been caught so easily. He ordered them to be brought before him after they had been taken round the city mounted on donkeys, for public exhibition.

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When the messengers went to carry out the orders, the jesters remonstrated in vain that they were not the thieves, but no one listened to them. They were mounted on donkeys, facing the tail, and then taken round the principal streets of the city, and finally brought before the king. The people jeered at them as they passed.

The king, however, recognized them at once and was angry with the guards who brought them. 'You fools!' he exclaimed, 'what have you done? Can't you see that these are men from my court?' Then addressing the two men he said: 'I am very sorry to see you in this plight, but at the same time I cannot help laughing. How did this happen? Did you by any chance go to sleep, for how else did the outlaw manage to trap you, and make you look like fools?'

Then the jesters told their story. 'Your Majesty! the outlaw came about midnight in the guise of a woman and outwitted us both. He is really a clever fellow and if your Majesty is not very watchful he will take away everything as he has threatened to.'

On hearing this the king became thoughtful. He dismissed the men and summoned the court. He ordered a pan to be taken round once again. 'Let the one who is really brave take it,' he said. 'Remember how the jesters failed. He who is prepared to sacrifice himself, he alone should venture.'

Now there were two brothers at the court named Lalo and Patto. They were the king's own confectioners. They were shrewd men of business and

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had made money by cheating their customers. Their shop was in the centre of the chief market, where they sold all varieties of delicious but expensive sweets. As the pan came near them they snatched it, and dividing it into two began to eat it.

‘We shall manage to outwit the thief and capture him. If we don’t we are prepared to cut off our right hand. If we meet any one in the streets after dark, man or woman, we shall kill him or her. So please ask the people to be on their guard,’ thus spoke the two brothers.

Lalo and Patto then went home and the king announced by a beat of drums that no one was to come into the streets after dark, on penalty of death. The flower woman returned home and repeated the story to the prince. ‘Do not you go out brother after dark. The king has forbidden it,’ she advised.

By sunset the people shut themselves into their homes. All the shops were closed before the usual time, and it looked as if there was a hartal in the city. The streets were deserted and there was not a soul visible anywhere except the young prince who boldly walked to Lalo and Patto’s shop. The shop was closed and there was a huge lock on the door. The prince, however, knocked and shouted. ‘Please open the door and give me some sweets. I wish to buy them. Here is double the money. Please be quick, I am very hungry. I am a traveller who has just arrived and I am dying from hunger.’

Someone from behind the door replied, ‘Go away brother; the king’s orders are that no one should be found in the streets after dark. He who breaks

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the order will die. You will be killed without any reason. Find some corner and spend the night there. Go, and be quick about it.'

'I shall go away as soon as you give me something to eat. How can I bear this hunger the whole night?' replied the prince. 'I have not eaten for the last three days. Here is double, three times your usual price. Please give me something to eat. If you do not wish to open the door, pass it through this window grille. Surely you do not wish me to die!'

This persistent request softened the confectioners' hearts, and above all, they had been promised three times the usual profit. Lalo said, 'I shall give you some sweets but what guarantee have I that you will not run away without paying. Give me the money with one hand and take the sweets with the other.'

Lalo put his hand through the grille for money. The prince caught it and said, 'I shall not let it go till I get the sweets'.

Then Patto put out his hand with the parcel of sweets. The prince caught his hand too and tied both their hands tightly to the grille rod. The brothers began to shout but no one came to their rescue as the people thought it was a trick being played by the outlaw to make them leave their homes. After securely tying the two brothers' hands the prince cut the palms from each hand and left the place. He went straight to the king's palace and informed the sentry at the gate that the thief had been caught at the confectioners' shop, and he had been asked by Lalo and Patto to convey the news to the king. They had cut off the thief's palms and

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had sent them with him to convince the king. He then gave them to the sentry and said, 'You had better hurry up and take them to the king. He is sure to reward you for the good news you give him.' He saw the sentry hurry to the king with the trophy, and he then returned to the gardener's cottage and to bed.

'WAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR'

The sentry went to the king's quarters and informed the chamberlain what the visitor had told him, showed the palms and added that Lalo and Patto had sent word that if the king was anxious to catch the thief let him send somebody at once. The king was very happy to hear the news and ordered the thief to be brought before him.

Ten or twenty men ran to the confectioners' shop. They found no one outside so they broke open the door and entered the shop. Then they saw two men with one hand tied to the window grille with the palms cut off. They were taken for thieves and the men marched them to the king. The two brothers remonstrated and said they were the confectioners, Lalo and Patto, and not thieves. But who would believe them? If they were confectioners then where were the thieves? The king's orders were to bring the men from the confectioners' shop, with palms cut off, to him. Who were they to disobey the royal orders? So the brothers were taken away.

When they reached the palace, the king had changed his mind about seeing them immediately. He ordered them to be tied, by their feet with their heads down, to his palace gates. The guards obeyed his instructions and the two men were suspended

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from the arch of the gate and kept hanging there the whole night.

In the morning it was known all over the city that the confectioners had caught the thieves and they were to be brought before the king that morning. Crowds of people flocked to the king's court to hear the trial of the thieves. As the king took his seat the guards brought the confectioners before him. At the sight of these men the king became very angry and shouted to the guards, 'Release these men, they are the confectioners and not the thieves. Did you not recognize them?'

When they were released the king asked them to sit by him and then asked them many questions.

'Well my friends! what has happened? Where has your shrewdness gone that you were yourselves outwitted and have lost your right palms? Did the outlaw bring an army of men with him that you hid yourselves in the shop? How many were they? Did they forcibly cut your palms? Be quick with your story, and then go home and attend to your injuries.'

The confectioners, with their heads bowed down with shame, replied, 'Your Majesty! We do not know what to say. The thief was alone. He seems to be very intelligent. Against him our cleverness—and we two brothers are known to be very clever—was as nothing. We hesitate to tell you, but to put it shortly, the thief is quite capable of depriving your Majesty of your kingdom. If any one dares to oppose him he is sure to come to this pass.' They showed their palmless hands, and everyone laughed.

The king was worried when he heard this. 'He

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seems to be a very clever fellow,' thought the king. 'It does not seem easy to catch him. I shall try once more. Let me see if anyone who has eaten my salt, without serving the state, is prepared to undertake this task.'

He ordered the minister to take a special pan round the court again, and promised a big reward to the person who succeeded in capturing the thief. The court dancer, when she heard of the big reward, was tempted, and she seized the pan. She ate it and said, 'This is the job for us dancing women. No one else can do it. Just as you present me with this pan, so shall I cut the nose of the thief and present it to your Majesty! If I had known this before, I should have been the first one to undertake the work, and would have finished it by this time. Then those poor men would not have suffered. I shall cut the man's nose in the presence of five people, and by tomorrow morning I shall bring him before the court. If I do not do it my name is perdition,' swore the dancer. 'Please proclaim it to the city, and let him who dares come to my house tonight, for I shall punish him.' The king applauded her and then dismissed the court.

The flower woman returned home and told the prince what had happened. 'Whoever goes to the dancer's house tonight will be taken as a thief, and she will cut off his nose', she laughed.

On hearing this the prince made his plan for the night. As soon as the sun set and darkness began to envelop the city he set out, and went straight to the dancer's home and knocked at her door. 'Open!

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open,' he shouted. 'I have come to give you good news. Hurry up, you are wanted at the court. His Majesty wishes you to come there as the thief has been caught and has been taken before the king. Hurry!'

Women are so gullible! The court dancer believed the story. She said distractedly, 'How can I go? I have sent away my coach driver. Who will drive me to the palace? How can I go without a driver?'

The prince quieted her and said he could drive and would take her to the court. He went to the stables and brought the carriage to the door, and the court dancer got into it. The screens to the carriage windows were drawn together and the woman could not see where they were going. The prince took her to a school which was situated in a very lonely place. At that time of the night the place was deserted and not a soul was in sight. The prince stopped the carriage and asked the court dancer to come out. Then he seized her and tied her to the front door. The woman struggled and screamed and shouted, but there was no one to hear her. Then the prince drew out a pocket knife and cut off her nose. 'I am the thief,' he cried. 'Have a good look at me so that you will remember me. Whoever tries to fight me, I shall punish them. I am going to take the kingdom away from the king.' Then he blackened the woman's face and body. He cut off her ears as well as lips, shaved her head and made her look as ugly and hideous as possible. Then he left her. The woman cried out all night but no one heard her.

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In the morning the children came to school. The first thing that met their eyes was the woman tied to the front door. No sooner had they seen her, than they fled from the place. Soon a rumour spread in the city that a witch had got into the school building. She had come to kill the children and eat them. There was much excitement in the city and the news was brought to the king.

The king sent his men to investigate, with orders that if the story were true, then the witch was to be taken to the burial ground outside the city, a pit should be dug and half her body should be buried in it, the head and shoulders remaining out; that she was to be given no food or water and no one was to be allowed to go near her.

The king's orders were carried out. 'Why do you punish me,' the dancer sobbed. 'I am the court dancer and the thief has done this to me.' The royal servants, however, said that they had to carry out the king's orders but they would tell him what she had said.

People came in thousands to see the witch. They saw her terrible looks from a distance, and said she was really an evil one, and some of them even threw stones at her.

The royal servants returned to the king and told him what the court dancer had said. The king wondered if what she said could be true. Perhaps the thief had disfigured her, so he ordered his servants to bring the woman before him.

The servants hurried back to the burial ground and released the woman. They took her to the king

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who shuddered when he saw her mutilated, pitiful face.

‘Tell me how this happened, and go,’ said the king.

The woman was in tears which made her look more ugly. ‘Your Majesty! what do you wish to know?’ She managed to say, between tears. ‘This is my karma. The man who has done this is sure to take your kingdom one day,’ and without another word she left. People jeered as she passed, and taunted her, ‘You wanted the big reward, take it, take it,’ they gibed.

The king was very disturbed and said, ‘What sin have I committed that this outlaw should have sprung up? I can no longer entrust the task of catching him to others. I must do it myself’.

So the king made it known to the people: ‘No one is bold enough to catch the thief; therefore, I must do it myself. I shall catch him tonight. First I shall go to the temple of the Goddess Harsiddha and after praying to her I shall arm myself. If I get rid of this outlaw then alone shall I know that I am the true son of my parents. He who wishes to lose his life should leave his home after dark,’ warned the king.

The king then retired to his quarters and the assembly dispersed. The flower woman came home very excited, and told the prince of the king’s decision. ‘Brother, don’t go out tonight. King Vikram is a very brave man and is sure to overpower the outlaw tonight. The great goddess protects him so he is not afraid of any one. Please don’t go out

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tonight,' she pleaded.

Impatiently the prince said, 'All right, all right', and the woman was assured, and busied herself with her household work. When alone, the prince beat his chest and said, 'I shall capture the king!' Then he thought, 'Why should I not pray to the same goddess the king worships?' So with folded hands and head bowed he began to pray, 'O great Mother! Thou art the cause of the whole Universe, of the conscious and the unconscious world. King Vikram is thy protégé. He is brave through thy strength. I am his son and have come here as an outlaw. If I am really his son then come to my rescue and see that I am not defeated. For my defeat will really mean Vikram's defeat. My humiliation will be his. If it is Thy wish, Mother, nothing will happen to me.' As he finished his prayer five grains of rice fell on him. The prince knew this to be a good omen and was elated with the thought.

As night came, Vikram carrying his offering to the goddess, went to the temple to pray. He lighted lamps, burnt incense before her image and then sat in meditation.

The prince armed himself and left the cottage as soon as it was dark, and went to the king's palace. Outside the gate he saw fresh footprints, which he guessed to be Vikram's, and he followed them to the temple. He saw the temple lights and when he cautiously looked in, he saw the king and heard him praying aloud, 'O mother, let me catch the thief tonight. If I am not able to, then the people will laugh at me and put me to shame.'

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The prince heard these words and thought, 'If he comes out he will kill me. If I make the first move perhaps I can outwit him.'

He then silently closed the temple door, locked it from outside and sealed it with his seal. On the wall he wrote in a bold hand, 'Whoever opens this will be whipped. The father of the thief is locked inside, and it is I who have done so.'

After some time the king rose up from his meditation and told his goddess, 'I shall return to you after I have caught the thief'. He tried to open the door, but could not do so. He saw that it was closed from outside, so he shouted, 'Who is there? Who has done this? Do you wish to die that you play such tricks. Open you fool! If you open at once I shall not kill you.'

Then the prince replied, 'O king! I belong to your nobility. How can you kill me? It is my duty to die for the king, and the great goddess is your protector, otherwise I would have killed you. I have come to get my dues, my estate. Today I have locked you in, but tomorrow I shall put you in prison if you do not give me your kingdom.'

The king listened. It was long past midnight and he knew there would be no one near-by, so it would be futile to raise an alarm. He was curious to know who the man was, and asked: 'Who are you and what is your name? Where have you been all these years that you come now to claim your estate? Where do you live? Who is your father? Since you sound so brave you must have someone helping you. Who is he? If you think you can defeat me,

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remember, only a brave man can conquer the brave. If a deer fights a lion it is sure to be killed. Are you a fool? You do not seem to know much about me. But I do not wish to kill you without knowing who you are. That is why you are still alive. From your voice too you appear to be young, and that is another reason why I do not kill you. Open the door and ask for my forgiveness. Why do you court death?’

‘My Lord!’ replied the prince, ‘I too belong to a noble family. I am descended from royalty. After twelve years I have found out. That is why I have come now to claim my property. I have no desire to rob the poor. I shall rob the rich and the powerful. If you give me my proper place, I shall bow to your feet, otherwise I shall harass the city and if the people curse, the fault will be yours and not mine. I have come to claim what you promised me in writing, no more. You wrote it and then disappeared. Do you remember now?’

The king could not understand what the boy meant and replied, ‘I don’t know what you are talking about. If I have given you anything in writing show it to me. What is the use of shouting about it?’

The night had slowly passed and it was now morning. The prince hurriedly walked away for fear of being caught if the king raised an alarm. He passed the gate of the king’s palace and told the guard that he had come from the king to inform the chief minister that the king had caught the thief inside the temple of the goddess and wished him to

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go there with some men. 'You had better go at once and tell this to the chief minister without delay,' he said. He saw the guard run to convey the message to the chief minister, then he returned home and went to bed.

No sooner had the news reached the chief minister than it spread through the city—the king had caught the thief in the temple of the goddess Harsiddha. People flocked to the temple to see the outlaw who had defied the king. The chief minister arrived on the scene with a regiment of the king's body-guards. On reaching the temple, he found the king was not there and saw the door of the temple locked, and read the words written on the wall: 'Whoever opens this will be whipped.'

The minister held a council immediately to decide what to do. 'His Majesty is not here,' he said, 'but this beautiful handwriting seems to be his. Shall we open the gate without his permission?'

'Why not send a messenger to the palace,' suggested someone. 'and ask for His Majesty's orders.'

The suggestion was generally approved and a messenger on horseback was sent to get the royal orders. The messenger galloped away and came back from the palace, with the news that the king had not returned to the palace since he had left it the previous evening.

The chief minister then became suspicious. He examined the handwriting more carefully and came to the conclusion that it was not the king's. 'It might have been the thief who wrote this,' he

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thought. 'Is it possible he has outwitted His Majesty!' He went round the temple to look for a window so that he could look inside. He found a grilled window and looked in. At last in the gloom he saw the king sitting before the goddess, and he asked in a whisper whether he should open the door.

The king replied from inside, 'Open it, but I am in meditation. When we are alone I shall tell you what happened last night.'

So the minister ordered the lock to be broken and opened the door. The people saw the king sitting in calm meditation and they dispersed quietly. They knew that the thief had outwitted the king but no one dared to say it aloud.

In the afternoon the king returned to the palace. He was, however, very much upset and could neither eat nor sleep. The next day he summoned his court and forgetting his pride, gave them an account of what had happened. 'The thief must be caught at all cost and at once,' he said, and asked who would do it.

The chief minister with folded hands replied, 'Your Majesty! It is for you once again to undertake the task. If the thief can outwit a person like your Majesty, an ordinary man stands no chance of getting him.'

The king ordered the pan to be taken round once again but no one dared to touch it. They either turned their face away or looked down. Everyone had the same fear that if a clever person like the king could be outwitted there would be no chance for him. The king understood and knew that he

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would have to try again, and he dismissed the court.

The flower woman went home and told the prince all that had happened, and advised him not to go out that night as the king was determined to capture the man.

That night, when everyone had retired, the prince got ready. He knew that the king would be very alert and would kill anyone he saw in the street. It would, therefore, be risky to go into the city. He thought that if the king found no one in the streets he might try the river bank just outside the city. He decided to go there and planned what he should do. On the way to the river he had to pass the dwellings of washermen. At one place he saw an ox tied to a tree, with bundles of soiled clothes tied on its back, ready to be taken for washing before day-break. He untied the ox and led it to the river. He also took an earthen pot from a potter's on the way and coated it outside with lime. Thus equipped he came to the place on the river bank where the washermen washed their clothes. He gently put the pot, bottom up, in the water and it began to float with the current. Then he began to wash the clothes, making enough noise to attract the king if he passed that way.

The king had made up his mind to catch the thief whatever happened. He first rode to the temple of the goddess, offered her flowers and with a prayer for her blessings, left the place. He rode for some time in the city and when he saw no one he went out along the river bank. As he neared the dhobi-ghat, he heard someone washing; and was surprised to find a washerman working so late. He became

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suspicious, and went nearer and watched the man for sometime, and making up his mind that he was a genuine washerman, asked him, 'Brother, I heard that a thief came this way. Have you seen him? Do you know which way he has gone?'

For several minutes the prince was very nervous when he saw the king watching him so intently, but when he heard these words his courage returned. Disguising his voice he calmly replied, 'You must be the king! And at this time of the night! Your Majesty, there was a man who came here a little while ago. He asked about the king, and wanted to know if I had seen him. He told me he would reward me if I told him where to find you. As if I, a poor washerman, should know. He must be the thief. He had tried to disguise himself and had whitened his hair, with lime—that much I could see. But when I told him that I had not seen you he left.'

When the king asked him which way he had gone, he replied, 'He has gone back to the city, but not by the road, for he jumped into the river and planned to walk along the river bank, under cover of the water.'

The king looked up and down the river and saw the whitened pot bobbing up and down on the surface a little ahead. 'If what the washerman says is true this might be the thief.' It was too dark to see anything clearly. The king however, decided to investigate the mystery. He asked the washerman to hold his horse and jumped into the water and swam towards the pot.

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No sooner had the king gone than the prince mounted the horse and galloped away. He went to the palace and told the guard that the king had sent a message that the thief had been caught, and asked for a few men to be sent to the river bank. 'I have galloped here on the king's horse to tell you this,' he concluded.

The guard saw the king's horse and had no reason to doubt the truth of the story. The prince left the horse with the guard and returned to the gardener's cottage.

The king swam to the pot and saw what it was. When he swam back to the shore and found the washerman had disappeared with the horse, he realized that it was a trick, and the washerman had been the thief. The king had been outwitted again, and he returned sadly to the palace. By the time he reached there it was morning. Crowds of people had gathered near the palace to hear news about the thief. When they saw the king they quietly dispersed.

The king acknowledged that the thief was a very clever and resourceful man. He had drums beaten in the city to proclaim his message to the thief: 'You are not a thief, but a clever man. I am pleased with you and invite you to my court. I shall reward you and grant you whatever you desire.'

The flower woman went home and told the prince of the king's proclamation. So the prince told her, 'I am the thief. Take this message from me to the king. I know he will not punish you for harbouring me, but reward you for the message you take to him. Tell him that I shall present myself at the court if

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His Majesty sends his chief minister to receive me and take me to the court in state. He must also send a court dress suitable to my rank as one of the nobles of the court.'

The woman was beside herself with joy. She put on her best clothes and went to the king to deliver this important message. The king was delighted with what the woman had to say and gave her many presents. He then ordered his chief minister to select one of the best court dresses and go personally to the outlaw, and bring him in state to the court the next day.

The chief minister carried out the king's orders. The prince put on the beautiful court dress and mounted the elephant and went to present himself before the king. People flocked to see the young man who had outwitted their king. The king too received him with great honour, and made him sit by his side, and then asked him about his parentage. The young man smiled and drew out the note the king had given to his mother. The king recognized his own handwriting and his seal, and when he had read the note he remembered his marriage with the bania girl. He was overjoyed to learn that this young man was his own son. He embraced him, and with great pride introduced him to the court. There was great rejoicing in the city. The people were happy to know that this brave, handsome young man was their own prince.

The king then sent for the prince's mother. When her father and sister-in-law learnt that she had really married Vikram, they were very much surprised.

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They asked her for her forgiveness.

‘Such was the great King Vikram, generous and brave. If you, O King Bhoja, are like him then mount the throne.’ The figure ceased speaking, and left King Bhoja in a thoughtful mood.

